

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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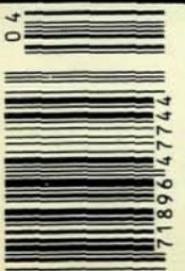
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MIKE SHAYNE

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EDWARD GOLDSTEIN
ANITA GOLDSTEIN
Publishers

CHARLES E. FRITCH
Editor

ROZ GIRGUS
Art Director

LEO MARGULIES
Founder

SHADOW OF DEATH

by Brett Halliday



Shayne had faced death before but never in such close proximity as this. Eight rifles were trained on him, and each one was carried by a soldier who knew how to use it! 4

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The apartment door burst open and three windows shattered inward. Before Shayne could react, he found himself staring at eight men clothed in camouflage fatigues. Each man carried an M-16A1, and each rifle was trained on him!

Shadow of Death

by BRETT HALLIDAY

JADE STARED INTENTLY INTO THE ELEVATOR'S MIRROR AND decided she had never looked better. Catching the eye of the grey-haired old man who was watching her, she smiled back, knowing she had made his evening. Then, the Oriental flipped her thick, black hair over her shoulder and stepped out of the elevator ahead of him.

Damn, she thought, it felt good to be back at work after even a week off.

The unpleasantness was behind her now. So she had lost her sponsor. She had been about ready to dump the old pimp anyway. Freelancing, she knew, meant never having to split the take. Besides, she only had to be nice to the johns she liked. She hated being told who she had to turn on.

Jade swept into the warm Miami evening. A lone piano sat by the pool tinkling out a lie, "I'll be yours forever." Forever, hell. One night was hard enough. She watched the tuxedoed men wrap themselves around frail, elderly women. The scent of cologne and money hung in the air. A young guy in a white dinner jacket whispered in the ear of a gray-haired matron whose subsequent smile cracked a layer of make-up.

They were all doing it. Hustling. It would be so much easier now that Haggard was dead. For a few days she had tried to do as that redhaired man her uncle called Shayne had said. She had gone into the slums with "her kind," with a bunch of starving, jobless refugees. Their poverty shocked her. She remembered that time in Saigon when she had barely reached puberty and still the soldiers paid her to sit on their laps and let them paw her. At first she had hated it, doing it only for the few extra pieces of military script or piastres it brought. She had told herself, though, it was better than rice and dog meat and sleeping with her seven brothers and sisters in a small room.

Then a strange thing had happened. She had found herself enjoying it. She liked the power of her gift, being able to arouse men, to control them, to get them to bring her beautiful things. She could become totally detached. Making love to them was no more involving than watching American movies.

NOW THE FONTAINEBLEAU WAS A GREAT PLACE FROM which to operate. It had class and money. She merely had to lounge by the pool in her green string bikini and men would ask her out. She glanced at the palm-covered island in the middle of the pool. So artificial. Oh, well, if they could afford Jade, let them have her.

She paused to light up a cigarette. The only thing that had surprised her lately was reading that the man called Shayne had shot her "husband." Still, Haggard had deserved it. Running around like some kind of civic-minded vigilante. He'd have been better off like her getting into — what was the term she had seen in the newspaper — "victimless crime."

The lights shimmered off the pool's blue surface. Ten twenty-five. She headed back toward the front entrance. 10:30 the voice on the phone had said, and she was nothing if not punctual.

What would he be like? The voice on the phone was tinged with an Asian accent. She hoped it wasn't another of those Japanese businessmen. She had never seen a race of men so turned on by electric toys — probably ones they had invented. Normally . . . she laughed, thinking her "normally" was only three days old . . . but normally, the last two times anyway, she had picked the john. The first night back had been a lawyer from St. Louis and the second a college professor from Kentucky.

This john was different, and intriguing. He had called her on the phone, telling her how he had seen her in the Fontainebleau's lobby and had inquired about her. He had, he claimed, fallen in love with her instantly. Besides, he had said, they had known each other before.

That had bothered her. Once was enough. She hated encore performances. There was always the danger the john would fall in love with her or worse, try something really kinky.

Jade rubbed her neck just beneath a string of pearls. It still hurt, but she knew it was more psychological than physical. In her last job for Blythe-Smith, that businessman from Detroit with the yellow card had tried to kill her. He had hit her and then started to choke her. What terrified her the most was his eyes. They had looked right at her, but they had never seen her. They had been staring at someone else, someone miles away.

At least Haggard had stopped him — with a bullet. Come to think of it, Haggard hadn't been that bad at first. The young soldier loose for a night on Tudo St. who had wandered into her bar. Could he drink.

But that was long ago. She smiled at the bellman who opened the door. All doors were open for her now. A parade of cars kept arriving at the entrance, but almost all of them let people out. A white Mercedes, a black Cadillac. 10:30 said her thin, gold watch. He would be here soon. What would he be like?

Standing there, the wind blowing her hair, she closed her eyes and tried to imagine him from his voice. A large man. Extremely confident. Powerful. Not the type to let anyone cross him, but graceful, courteous. He would make her feel like a lady, and in turn she would make him feel like a man.

A limo with dark, one-way glass pulled up in front of the door and stopped. An Oriental chauffeur in a white suit got out and came over to her.

"Miss Jade?" he said politely.

She nodded. It was not her wont to speak to lackeys.

"My master awaits you within the car," he said.

She followed him to the rear door, which he opened. In the dark she could see a large form draw on a cigarette. The orange glow illuminated his eyes. For a moment her heart skipped. The eyes looked familiar.

"Get in," he called out, and immediately a hand from the rear helped her in and closed the door.

"As they say in America, 'long time no see,' my dear Jade," said her host.

Just before he flipped on an interior light she knew who it was.

Her scream was dry, brief, and drowned out by the sound of the accelerating engine.

II

SHAYNE STARED INTO THE GIANT BRANDY SNIFTER THAT TIM

had long ago copped from The Beef House. The amber pool looked inviting, so inviting the big redhead half wished he could dive in and disappear. The last week had been like a season in hell.

"Damned air conditioner quit again, shamus," called out Rourke. "You wanna help me throw open some windows. If we don't get some circulation in here soon, we're gonna have two stewed Irishmen."

Shayne didn't budge. He had come to the apartment of his reporter friend to get away. The last thing he wanted was to be bothered by something else. Didn't he have enough on his mind?

In the background the reporter strained his thin body against a heat-swollen sash. "If you don't want to do the heavy labor, can you manage to flip on the tube? I want to hear what Humble Howard has to say about 'the evident ineptitude of the Dolphins' inefficient offense,' to coin a phrase."

The powerful detective tilted the glass toward his lips. He could hardly feel the warm Martell as it splashed across his slightly swollen tongue. In the last week or so he had downed a lot of liquor; even for him.

"Come on, Mike," urged the thin reporter. "Snap out of it. You've been walking around like a zombie for days now. If you wanna talk about it, geez, you know it's more important than *Monday Night Football*."

Shayne glanced around the living room. Several weeks of newspapers seemed to be breeding like white mice. TV dinners were scattered on every flat surface, and enough clothes lay about to keep a Chinese laundry in business. The stale odor of liquor, left-overs, and laundry fermented in the unventilated room. It smelled and looked the way he felt.

"You don't want to talk. Tell you what I'm going to do, shamus. I'll give you the Chargers and four. That's better odds than you can get from Bennie the Book."

The redhead settled deeper into his best friend's overstuffed chair.

"Geez, Mike. Do something. Curse me. Hit me. This silent treatment's driving me up the wall."

With a sluggish movement, Shayne slung the snifter against the wall across from him. The glass shards mingled with the amber liquid on the reporter's threadbare rug to create a hideous collage. "Damn it, Tim. I want to be alone."

"Sure, Greta Garbo. That's why you came over here."

The redhead had always given his friend credit for knowing every conceivable piece of information. How many times had he used the old scarecrow to fill in background on a case? But the man was an expert

on human nature too. Maybe Tim was right — he had come over here because he wanted to talk it out.

Rourke stepped over the mess on the rug and sat on the hassock in front of him. Shayne looked at his friend and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Tim. I didn't mean . . ."

"No sweat, shamus." He gestured at the rug. "I think," he said in the affected voice of a Palm Beach decorator, "that splash of color coordinates divinely with the rest of the decor."

Shayne laughed in spite of himself.

"It's Haggard, isn't it, Mike?"

"Yeah," admitted the redhead.

"You've killed before."

"But not like that. My life wasn't in danger."

"Will Gentry's was."

Shayne sat up. "I've never shot a man in the back, in cold blood."

"You know there was nothing else you could do."

"That's just it. I felt so helpless, forced into something I didn't want to do."

"Look, Mike. Haggard was a vet, obviously suffering from what the shrinks love to call Delayed Stress Syndrome."

"Oh, I see now," said Shayne sarcastically. "Throw 'em in a cage, stick a label on them, and everything's O.K."

Unable to restrain himself, Rourke leaped up like a skeleton-in-the-box. "You know me better than that. It's just that we're not qualified to deal with the kind of trouble Haggard had."

The redhead knew he had hit a raw nerve. In the time since Haggard's death, the reporter had written a series on the vet's death and life. Maybe profiling the deranged soldier whose crusade had wiped out a dozen syndicate types had been as hard on Tim as pulling the trigger had been for him? Funny, for as long as there had been men, there had been wars and the men who returned from them. But there was something different about Haggard and the like, and it dealt with the war he fought in Nam and then back in the good old US of A.

"Come on, Mike. You and I aren't the kind of guys who think they can save the world by sitting around and reasoning about it."

Shayne was about to agree when the room exploded.

In a single instant the apartment door burst open and three windows shattered inward.

Before the big redhead, his senses dulled by cognac and conscience, could react, he found himself staring at eight men clothed in camouflage fatigues.

Shayne would have thought he was hallucinating, that he was

looking at eight nightmarish images of Haggard, except that each man carried a very real M-16A1, and each rifle was trained on him.

III

THE TALLEST OF THE GROUP WALKED OVER TO WHERE Shayne sat silently. With the barrel of his "Black Death" he opened the detective's sports coat and poked for weapons. Dissatisfied, he patted the redhead's sides and legs down, all the while keeping the machine-oil-smelling rifle inches from Shayne's nose.

"Shayne's clean," announced the soldier.

"So's Rourke," said another who had just checked the reporter.

The redhead fought to pull back the dark curtain that covered his mind. Things were still a bit hazy. So they knew who he and Tim were. That was enough to start sobering him up. He needed time, time to see who they were, what they wanted, and what the odds were.

"Hey, Errol," said a blond-haired guy, "let's waste 'em — right here and now."

A small guy with a mustache stepped forward. "What do you think, Ben, about me wiring these guys with plastique. We set up a timer. When the TV game's over, their clock runs out of time."

"Naw," said a black. He drew out a glistening bayonet. "Say I be the one to carve up these dudes into little pieces. Then when we go fish tomorrow, we use them as chum. Think of the bread we save."

Another guy pulled out a nunchaku from his pistol belt. "Hey, I've been dying to try these out. I mean, they break pine boards and brick, but I need to give them the ultimate test — on human flesh and bones."

They laughed together — maniacally.

"Who are you guys?" stammered Rourke.

The tallest man marched up to the reporter, clicked his heels, and mock-saluted. "Corporal Donald Flynn, Alpha Company, First Platoon, reporting for duty, sir."

Rourke sat open-mouthed.

The black with the bayonet pressed the point against the reporter's larynx. "You suppose to say, 'What are your orders, corporal?'"

Shayne started forward, but stopped half-way up as a garrote caught him in the throat and yanked him backward. "Disobeying an officer," said a voice from behind him, "is a court martial offense, and out here in the jungle every court martial ends in death."

A one-armed soldier appeared beside Rourke. "I'll tell you what our orders are. Search out Charlie and destroy him."

"Yeah," said another with a Spanish accent, "don't you know a Combat Patrol when you see one?"

Shayne had a flash where this was headed.

"But we're not Charlie," protested Rourke. "I'm a reporter for the *Daily News* and this other guy is a detective."

A stocky man who looked like a weightlifter rolled his eyes back so that all that could be seen was the whites. "Hey, man, we can't tell that."

Another staggered at Shayne as if drunk. "You look like VC to me."

"Hard to tell," said another, getting a distant, vacant look. "You know these gooks all look alike."

The squad laughed in unison, and Shayne could see the sweat beads on the reporter's forehead.

The mustached man said, "We're crazy."

"Wacked out, dope fiend veterans," said another.

"Looney as your Aunt Harriet up in the attic," chimed in another.

"Hey," called out Shayne, "don't you think you guys have gone far enough with this gag?"

"What that ChiCom say?" called out the black.

"Easy, Tom-Tom," said the tall man, who Shayne guessed was their leader. "He's on to us. Let them up."

THE BAYONET AND GARROTE DISAPPEARED, AND THE soldiers let their weapons swing loose. Freed, Shayne knew he could yank the .38 from the small of his back and take out two or three before they got him. But he didn't. He knew what was going on. "You heard us talking?" he said.

"You and everybody else in this country," said the weightlifter.

"What's happening?" asked Rourke.

Shayne said, "It's a charade, Tim. And they've got a point."

"Yeah," answered the shaking reporter, "and it's at the end of that bayonet."

"We were stereotyping them," said the detective, "and they went along with it."

"Think of us as figments of your imagination," said the blond-haired soldier.

"Save it for your plays, Ollie," said their leader. "You're right, Shayne."

"Stereotyping, crap," exclaimed Rourke. "I wrote about one James T. Haggard who happened to be a deranged Viet veteran. I told the truth."

"I don't remember any stories by you going out on the wires about a vet who has become a successful businessman or written a prize-winning play," said the Hispanic, this time without his Spanish accent.

Rourke shot back, "Those things aren't news."

"You mean the only news about vets that counts is bad news." Similarly the black speaker had lost his jive speech.

Despite the situation, the reporter's Irish temper seethed. "Where do you clowns get off coming in my apartment and pushing us around?"

Shayne stood up, his lanky figure towering over even their leader, and crossed to his old friend. "Hold it, Tim. Let's hear what they have to say."

The one-armed man spoke up. Don't you see that the media controls the public's perception of the vet. They've been controlling it since *The Six O'clock News* showed how violent war is. That's partly why when I stepped off the plane in San Francisco, a long-haired girl asked me if I'd lost my arm in Nam. When I said 'Yeah,' she spit on me and told me, 'It serves you right.'"

"The public sees us the way we acted when we came in here," added the mustached man. "Why is it that the popular villain in TV, movies, and paperbacks is the Viet vet driven over the edge, the nutty ex-GI who can't fit into peacetime society?"

"You're not trying to tell me that all vets are well-adjusted model citizens?" said Rourke.

"No," answered the tall man, "but the public sees the hog in nature and takes nature for the hog."

The one-armed man continued, "A recent Harris Survey showed 91% of Viet vets were glad they served their country. Do you think John Q. Public knows that?"

"Take drug abuse," said the soldier holding the nunchaku. "You think of us as junkies. The VA found there was no difference between vets and non-vets of the same age group in drug usage."

The black man spoke up. "A lot of folks think that Nam was a dumping ground for 'niggers,' 'spics,' and other unwanted minorities. Actually 86% of the casualties were Caucasians."

The playwright went on. "How many people believe vets were forced to go to Nam unlike the patriots who fought for their country in World War II. Well, the opposite is true. Two-thirds of the guys who crawled through rice paddies enlisted, while two-thirds of those in The Big One were drafted."

"The public thinks of us as deserters, drug addicts, child killers, and looey-fraggers," said the soldier who had whipped the garrote over Shayne's head. "You know what — 97% of us were discharged honorably."

Before Rourke could speak, the weightlifter added, "And Mr.

Reporter, contrary to popular opinion, some of us can make it. We don't all resort to criminal activities. The Federal Bureau of Prisons claims that vets are less likely to be imprisoned than non-vets."

"O.K., guys." The tall man held up his hands. "You can climb down from your soap boxes — you made the point. Mr. Shayne, Mr. Rourke, let me introduce you to a few guys who made it. Private Fisher, front and center."

"Yo," said the stocky weightlifter as he stepped forward.

"Old 'Gentle Ben' is probably the most successful," said the leader. "From the lowly ranks of grunt rifleman, he's risen to president of his own computer company. Who'd have thought that a guy who couldn't cowl up to a six-pack would go so high."

"SunCoast Instruments," said Fisher. "We're growing with Miami. The only computer you'll ever need."

"Hey, Ben," called out the black. "This is a reunion, not a sales conference. You must have used that spiel to land that big Pentagon contract."

"The big mouth," said the tall man, "is Specialist Al 'Tom-Tom' Baker, our radio man."

"It's now TV," replied Baker.

"Tom-Tom" owns a TV repair shop in Chi."

"Appropriate," called out the blond as he took a can of beer from his fatigue jacket. "Somebody so full of hot air would migrate to the Windy City."

"Then, Ollie," came a voice, "you must live in Milwaukee."

"Spec. Browne there," said the tall man, "a/k/a Oil Can, went from ghost writing love letters to our girls back home to writing off-Broadway, award-winning plays."

"No way," said the Spanish-looking guy. "The only prize Oil Can ever deserved was a Pabst Blue Ribbon."

"That's Jose Tartabull, affectionately known as 'The Cisco Kid,' riding hard toward a Masters Degree in Community Planning."

"Wait for me Ceeeess-ko," urged the small guy with the mustache.

"Flash was our demolitions expert. Now he's just Bob Rainey, a successful electrician in Winchester, Kentucky."

"The one thing he's really wired on is bourbon," said Oil Can Browne.

The leader pointed to the one-armed figure in the corner. "'Catfish' was the best scout in Nam. Lost his arm in a VC booby trap."

"Didn't stop him from being — what's that you say — 'the best damned hunting guide in Gatlinburg, Tennessee,'" yelled out Browne.

The lean figure twirling his nunchaku called out, "Hey, Errol, you're not gonna forget me."

"Our enforcer," said the leader. "The man who should be in *The Guinness Book of Records* for 'Most Saigon Bars Singlehandedly Cleaned Out.' That is the nationally known Security specialist, the living legend men call Ron 'Mad Dog' Boyd."

"And women too," quipped the playwright. "If he could talk trash with women like he could sweep trash outta bars, he'd hold another record."

Shayne found himself laughing with the group and in so doing he had a momentary flash of what they meant to each other. "That leaves only you," he said to the leader.

Ollie Browne interrupted. "Let me have the honor. Our new squad leader is the manager of your friendly neighborhood McDonald's somewhere in Boulder, Colorado. Donald 'Errol' Flynn, often referred to as 'Error Flynn.' "

The rawboned redhead didn't have to ask who their old squad leader was, but something did puzzle him. He fired up a Camel, offered the pack around, and said, "You didn't come from all over the US to hold a reunion in Tim's apartment."

"No," said the playwright. "Since we all got back safely from Nam, we've kept in touch. So, when a few days ago, each of us got a telegram from Haggard saying he needed our help." He held up a yellow paper, then crushed it suddenly and tossed it toward Shayne's snifter. "We packed up and headed for Miami, no questions asked. Ever since Bullseye got us out of that North Vietnamese POW camp, we'd have walked through the fires of hell for him."

Shayne felt his own variety of brimstone burning a hole in his gut.

"When we got here, it was too late," said Flynn, dragging on a Camel. "Listen, Shayne, we don't blame you for what happened to Sarge."

"Yeah," said the playwright, "Rourke's article was right on target, in a way. Bullseye had been screwed up for a long time."

Tom-Tom added, "Since he went into the Honky Tonk bar on Tudo St. and fell hard for that tramp."

"Jade," said Shayne without exhaling.

They all looked at each other. "How did you know?" said Flynn.

"It's the one thing Tim left out of his article. The girl's here, and he wanted to give her a chance for a new start."

"Jade in Miami?"

"Figures," mused Browne. "She was one bamboo sliver he couldn't get from under his skin. I told you then. We should have made sure

that export never left Southeast Asia."

Rourke broke out his stock of liquor. They finished it before midnight and sent out for more. Shayne went late into the night explaining exactly how Haggard had followed Jade to Miami, then systematically wiped out all the filth that surrounded her. But in lying down with the dogs of crime, he had inevitably picked up the fleas of violence. In the end he had been unable to distinguish between the good and the bad. The reporter then explained how Haggard had been on the verge of killing Will Gentry, the Miami Chief of Police.

By the time Shayne called it a night, he realized Tim had been wrong. Talking it out hadn't helped a bit.

SHAYNE WAS SLOGGING THROUGH A NIGHTMARE JUNGLE. The wet elephant grass slashed at his face, while the knee-deep mud pulled at his legs. The sunlight shooting through the palms speared him. Through his sweat-drenched eyes, he could make out figures popping out of the underbrush like targets in a grotesque shooting range.

Each face belonged to Haggard.

In the distance he heard a tinny sound. A bell. He groped forward, his hand grabbing the telephone.

The voice was Flynn's and it was scared.

"Shayne, we need your help. It's Ollie. Somebody — or something — just brutalized him. He's dead."

IV

SHAYNE HEADED NORTH ON BISCAYNE. TO THE EAST HE could see first light squinting at him. Splashing water on his face, he had thrown on the damp clothes of the night before. Their stale smell of cigarette smoke and spilled liquor now took him back to the bull session. What had Haggard wanted with his old Army buddies? What had been so urgent that he needed them all? Had he wanted to enlist them in his private war?

The redhead pulled the Buick onto the dew-covered blacktop of the address Flynn had given him. Con Brio Hotel, one of those tall, stucco buildings, loomed midway between the haunts of the very rich and dumps of the down-and-out. No gardener had manicured the green tentacles that now strangled its base, and a few paint-peeled shutters hung by a single hinge.

The elevator sputtered all the way to the fourth floor, and Shayne lost a bet when the doors slid noiselessly open. Standing at the end of the dark hall were Tom-Tom Baker and Bob Rainey. Neither looked happy as the detective approached.

"Some command post," said Baker, gesturing around at the white-washed walls.

"Only thing we could get for all of us at such short notice," commented Rainey.

Shayne, sensing their small talk camouflaged their not wanting to confront what had happened, said simply, "Where is he?"

The black man pointed at Room 402. Shayne went in through the open door, noting the splinters around the jamb. Flynn sat there staring into space. Fisher had buried his face in his huge hands.

Without taking his eyes from the open window, Tartabull said, "Since Nam, I make it a point to see the sunrise — every morning."

"Ironic, isn't it?" said Flynn. "In a one year tour of duty over there we lose only one man. Then we get back to the safety of the States, and in a single week two of us buy the farm."

Shayne eyed the floor where a sheet had been thrown over a body. So many red stains flecked the white where blood had seeped through. Gently he pulled the sheet back.

The bile rose up in his throat as if an overheated thermometer. Slowly he recovered the garish body. "Brutalized" had been an understatement.

"That time we were captured," said Fisher. "I thought I'd seen it all. But this."

Shayne glanced around. "Where are the cops?"

Nobody answered.

Finally Flynn said, "I guess we didn't think to . . ."

The redhead picked up the phone and dialed Gentry's private number. "Hate to get you up, Will, but there's a homicide at the Con Brio." He filled the Chief of Police in on the details and then hung up. "There'll be somebody here soon. Now, what happened?"

Homer Tully appeared in the doorway. "I'm stayin' in 401. I heard this ungodly scream. Worse than the time my kid brother got his foot caught in a beartrap. Anyway, I rushed through the connecting door and found Ollie lying there, cut to ribbons like a pack of rabid wolves had got to him."

Tartabull spoke up. "I heard the same scream from across the hall. The door there was locked, so I kicked it in. I saw the same thing Catfish saw."

"Neither of you spotted anybody in here?" said Shayne.

They shook their heads.

"Could the killer have gone out that door before you knocked it in?"

"No way," said Tartabull. "The security chain was still in place. I had to rip it off just to get in."

Shayne walked over to where Tartabull gazed at the dawn. "Then the killer had to go out the window."

"Not unless he's some kind of human fly," said Tartabull. "You're looking at a four-story drop. As soon as I saw Ollie lying there, for some reason I ran to the open window. I looked up and down. Nothing."

Shayne thought out loud. "Nobody through the door. Nobody through the window. And you guys looked around the room."

"There was nobody in here," said Tully, "unless he was invisible."

The detective summed it up. "Looks like there's only one solution left."

"You're not saying we . . ." said Tartabull.

"I didn't . . ." protested the one-armed hunting guide.

"Just because he was always all on your case," came Rainey's voice.

"Yeah," said Baker. "That's no reason. Shoot. So what if he was always jiving you about the way you talked. Real down home. I know you got hot a couple of times, but . . ."

"I wouldn't."

"Easy, guys," said Flynn. "Catfish wouldn't have no more than I would have. Besides, some people are all talk about how they'd give an arm and a leg for their buddies. Are you forgetting Catfish did it?"

Rainey and Baker lowered their heads. "Hey, Fish."

"I know," he said, waving off an apology.

SHAYNE SCANNED THE WINDOW CASING. THERE WERE scratch marks on the sill as if some previous tenant had kept a pet cat. The detective stuck his head out. The early morning sun gleamed off the dirty building. Just below the sill the stucco was pocked with tiny holes.

"What the hell's going on here?" said a voice.

Shayne turned around. Standing over the sheet was Ron Boyd. His hair was matted down and his eyes looked like slits.

"It's Ollie," said Flynn.

The weapons specialist knelt down and drew back the sheet. Without warning he vomited.

Fisher put a hand on Boyd's shoulder.

"Where were you?" said Shayne.

Boyd drew his sweatshirted hand across his mouth. "406. Sleeping. Kept thinking I heard something and finally got up."

"You're quite a sound sleeper," said Shayne.

"Once I get to sleep. Since Nam I haven't been able to fall asleep by

myself. I've been on these little red pills. Trouble is I can't get up in the morning. Some security specialist, huh? Why the hell didn't you guys roust me?"

"Hey, Mad Dog," said Flynn, "over there running into dead men is SOP, but here, well, we were shook up, just didn't think."

Boyd rose and walked to the open window. He took a series of deep breaths the way Shayne had seen martial arts experts do when they needed to compose themselves.

"What kind of an animal would do this to a man?" asked Rainey.

Abruptly Boyd turned back to the group. "You know what really grabs at my gut? I've seen this way of killing once before — in Saigon."

V

SHAYNE STUDIED THE SEVEN REMAINING SQUAD MEMBERS. Boyd's comment had shaken them, and eyes seemed to be in another time and place.

Finally Boyd picked up his comment. "One night in Saigon I was down on Tudo Street treating myself to a little R & R. This two-bit Vietnamese gangster was chugging Hamm's in the Honky Tonk and blowing off about how he had ripped off one of the black market bosses. That kind of crap happened all the time when those guys had a little too much rice wine, so I didn't think a lot about it — until the bar closed. You got a weed?"

Shayne handed him a Camel.

Boyd took three quick drags, then continued. "In the alley beside the bar a bunch of guys had gathered around a body. I got closer. It was the big mouth. He looked like a practice dummy for Jack the Ripper."

"Who did it?" said Shayne.

"The white mice — those were the Saigon cops, Shayne — never found the killer, but then I knew they wouldn't."

"Why?" said the detective.

"The killer was an Oriental assassin. The most deadly kind." He sucked deeply on the butt. "I've never tangled with one, and I hope as long as I live I never do."

Instantly the image of men in black sent by his old enemy Black Lotus shot through Shayne's mind. "Ninja," he said.

"You know about the Shadow Warriors?" said Boyd with surprise.

"Enough to know how deadly they are. Wait a minute." The big detective hurried to the window and looked out. "A ninja would explain how somebody dropped in unannounced in a fourth-floor room. Those holes in the wall were made by those fist spikes they wear. It

allows them to climb straight up, even on concrete, and it's a hell of a way to kill somebody."

"You ever see a ninja, Shayne?" said Boyd.

The rawboned redhead explained some of his encounters with the martial arts henchmen of the enigmatic Leiko Smith.

After listening, Boyd flicked his butt out of the window. "I don't mean this as a put-down, Shayne, but next to a true ninja those guys sound like pajamaed clowns. First, there are very few real ninjas. Only a select group can attain the necessary physical and mental discipline. Second, fighting a ninja is like trying to beat a shadow. They see you, but you don't see them. Third, if you had fought one, you'd be dead. Their training is complete, from a mystical awareness of the environment to turning anything into a weapon. As you are devoted to protecting life, they are interested only in taking it."

Tartabull interrupted. "If one of those assassins is loose in Miami, where would we find him?"

"You don't want to find him," Boyd shot back.

"No one," said Tom-Tom Baker, "can do what they did to Ollie without my going after them. We'll bust those suckers up."

"Yeah," said Rainey, "like we did that dope ring in Saigon."

"Be reasonable," said Flynn. "How are you going to find someone who's trained to be invisible?"

"Break a few heads, kick some tails," answered Tartabull. "They'll tell us."

"I 'spect," said Tully, "that since the last place Mad Dog saw a killing like this was in Saigon, the best place to start trackin' would be around some Vietnamese."

"Part of what you say is good, Homer," said Boyd. "Each of these ninjas, depending on their training, has an M.O., an individualized way of killing."

"Gentle Ben," said Baker, "you're from Miami. If the Cubans got Little Havana, what do the Vietnamese have?"

"There is a place downtown called 'Saigon West,'" said the computer-company president.

Rainey stood in the doorway, his M16 uplifted. "Let's get it," he yelled.

"Right on," shouted Baker, heading for the door. "Alpha Company is back in business."

"Hold it," the redhead bellowed, "it's not going to help anything if you guys go charging off half-cocked."

"Outta the way, Shayne," cracked Tartabull. "You're not one of us."

As the Hispanic reached out to shove the detective, Shayne grabbed the man's forearm in his meaty palm and jerked it behind him. Holding Tartabull in a solid hammerlock, he stared at the rest of the group. They were forming a semi-circle around him.

"Now listen," Shayne said, "some of you have to be here when the cops arrive or you're in big trouble. As for the rest, I've got an idea."

AS HE WHEELED THE LOADED BUICK THROUGH THE FIRE-gutted buildings and crowded street corners, Shayne had second thoughts about his plan. He could feel the tension, the combat nerves of men who have lost a comrade in battle. None of the men spoke — none had to. The detective knew what they were going through. At least he had gotten three of them to wait for Will's men — Tully and Tartabull because they were witnesses and Fisher because he looked paler than the sheet that had covered their fallen friend.

Shayne pulled over to the cracked curb, glad he had talked the men into leaving their weapons behind. During his search for Haggard, he had discovered that the refugee ghetto was a powderkeg waiting for a spark, especially one lit by a white man.

"Let me do the talking," he announced. "Lam Duc, their leader trusts me, and if anybody knows anything, he will."

"If it doesn't work your way, and fast," said Baker, we'll try it ours."

As the five men weaved through the squatting Vietnamese refugees and the small carts of the open market, Shayne could read the recognition in their faces. And he didn't like what he read — their bodies were back where their minds had never left.

The old man was hunkering outside the same weatherbeaten door he had been the last time the detective had spoken to him. As usual he was surrounded by several old women in their *ao dai* who were combing each other's hair. Time didn't seem to have much meaning to these people.

"Nuoc mam," said Flynn.

"They even brought that stinking fish sauce with them," said Rainey.

Shayne noticed that as they approached, the old women were silently replaced by young men in the traditional fighting garb. The powderkeg had a tinderbox for a fuse.

"We got trouble," said Boyd.

"Only if we make it," said the redhead sternly enough to insure they took it as a warning.

"Mr. Shayne," said Lam Duc without looking up, "it is with great

dishonor that I greet your coming. I have failed you twice. Jade, who you brought back safely to us, has regretfully returned to her old ways."

Shayne wasn't surprised. As the ninjas Boyd had discussed were committed to the taking of a life, so Jade seemed destined to giving forbidden pleasure.

Still the old man gazed straight ahead. "To my greater shame, I have failed to tell you the entire truth about her."

"The old man admits he's been lying," said Baker, "before we even ask him what we came here for. I say we turn this place into bamboo splinters."

"I think these guys will have something to say about that," said Boyd as the circle of Vietnamese around them grew.

Shayne, knowing they were just a heartbeat away from violence, said, "What didn't you tell me?"

"Some things about Jade, but I fear they matter little now. Sunday night I am told she got into a car and disappeared. I suspect the worst, for I have recently discovered the presence in Miami of the devil, Ho Lu."

Shayne recognized the name. "Isn't he the guy who arranged Jade's phony marriage to Haggard to get her into this country so he could put her to work on the streets?"

"Ho Lu," said Flynn. "We should have known."

"Known what?" said the redhead.

Flynn's nostrils flared, and the detective suspected he had a bit of the Irish in him, as he ranted, "Prostitution's just the tip of the iceberg. Dope, black market, death — he sold it all."

"Where can we find this Ho Lu?" said the detective, looking around at the angry faces.

"Not here," said the old man with a trace of a laugh. "Since he has left our country, he has come to your San Francisco and prospered. I understand he now visits Miami on a business trip and is renting on the Beach."

Shayne pressed. "Why is Ho Lu here? What kind of business?"

"When you can answer that question, you will know how I have lied to you." With that the graybearded patriarch stood up and retreated into the run-down tenement he called home.

"What are we waiting for?" cried Baker. "Let's get the rest of the guys and pay our old friend Ho Lu a visit."

THE AFTERNOON SUN HEATED UP THE BUICK. THE WHOLE way back to the Con Brio Shayne sensed they were holding back on

him. They knew something, but what? Why were they so eager to see Ho Lu? Why had they given up on their vengeance so easily? They were unusually quiet — it was the silence of men ready to do battle.

When the elevator opened on the fourth floor, Shayne noticed the door to 402 was half open.

"Ben, Catfish, Cisco — you in there?" called out Flynn.

Nothing.

Shayne heard a faint rustling sound like a flag flapping in the breeze. The redhead led Alpha Company down the hallway in a hurry.

None of the men were prepared for the grizzly sight that greeted them.

Three bodies were strewn across the floor where Ollie's had been. Blood gushed from their dismembered forms, and pieces of flesh dangled like raw bacon.

"The window," shouted Rainey.

Shayne thought he saw a black shadow departing.

Flashing silver pinwheeled toward them.

Shayne's massive body was already on the floor.

"Shuriken," yelled Boyd.

"Damn," screamed Baker. The redhead looked up to see a pointed star sticking in the shoulder of the black.

But what struck Shayne the most was what he had seen framed by the window as the gleaming Oriental weapons hurtled toward them.

It hadn't been a hand that had launched them — it had been a huge, black claw.

VI

FEELING THE URGENCY, SHAYNE DECIDED AGAINST BLUFFING his way into the Miami Beach estate. Deblin, one of Petey Painter's detectives owed him, so the redhead had used Ho Lu's location as payment for the debt. The detective had driven by the Bal Harbour ranch style home twice. It was surrounded by an eight-foot stucco wall. Rental properties rarely had elaborate, if any, security systems, so he picked the north side because it was thick with snake plants and palmetto.

Using an adjacent sea grape, he climbed up and over the wall and dropped into a patch of sweet-smelling bougainvillea. The estate seemed deserted except for the beach side which was patrolled by two Orientals in white business suits.

As he caught his breath, Shayne thought of the ghoulish scene he had left behind. Tulley and Tartabull had been clawed nearly beyond recognition. They looked as if they had been dropped into a wild animal's cage at the zoo. Fisher was lucky. Their returning must have

scared off the ninja before he had finished his work. Fisher had a huge lump on his forehead, but only a single claw mark on his left arm.

Gentry himself had shown up at the Con Brio. The Chief of Police had helped Shayne convince the ex-soldiers that their security might well depend on numbers, and certainly Ben Fisher was in no position to protect himself. They had argued, but in the end they had accompanied Gentry downtown for some "routine questioning," an act the Chief told Shayne he could stretch into twenty-four hours at most.

Before leaving Will Gentry had turned to Shayne. "These three bodies are really ripped up, Mike, and I read the report on Oliver Browne. It's the worst set of murders since the Beach Butcher. Are you sure our killer's even human?"

LYING THERE AMIDST THE BOUGAINVILLEA, SHAYNE WONDERED. How could anybody calling himself a man do what the killer had done to another human being — THREE TIMES?

Springing from his cover, the big detective sprinted across the well-manicured lawn toward the house. Ducking behind a royal palm, he looked into a window. Nothing. He moved up to the next room. Bingo. Inside, a small white man in shirt sleeves worked hurriedly at the keyboard of a mini-computer. From out of his view, Shayne heard a voice with an Oriental accent say, "Mr. Reynolds, the time is short. The program must be double checked if we are to make delivery on schedule."

A door slammed, and Shayne moved on. Toward the front of the house, he came upon a veranda. The redhead tried the sliding glass door. It was open. Silently he slipped inside.

The house was obviously undergoing remodeling. Hammers, saws, and drills sat in the corner while sheets covered the few pieces of furniture. In the distance he heard the same Oriental voice echo. He headed down the hall toward the sound.

Shayne put his ear to a closed pocket door. He heard the voice snap in anger, "You work for all the others — why not for me?"

"Can't you understand," came a trembling female voice, "that it's different?"

Shayne never heard his answer.

The stick broke across the redhead's brawny shoulders, and he tumbled forward, knocking a porcelain vase off its stand.

He looked up to see a splintery staff swooping toward his head. Instinctively he grabbed the wooden stand and parried the blow.

Before his white-suited attacker could strike again, Shayne kicked up hard. His 12-D oxfords caught the giant in the groin. When he doubled

over in pain, the big detective cracked his skull with the stand, shattering the mahogany into bits.

Shayne was off and tearing back down the hallway. At its end the veranda door was half open, and another white suit stepped in, blocking the redhead's escape.

The Oriental's hands snapped into a fighting position.

Shayne's athletic past came to the fore as he hurtled his two-hundred-plus pounds at the surprised opponent. If Coach Shula had seen the cross-body block at the Dolphins' training camp, the big redhead would have made the roster.

Shayne rolled through the glass shards and twisted metal that had been the sliding door. Across the grass another guard came running.

Shayne picked up a metal chair and swung it at the man's legs. In years of streetfighting the redhead had learned that no matter how tough the opponent, the shins — like the groin — were always vulnerable.

Two arms pinned him from behind. Shayne had had enough experience with these martial artists lately to learn he had trouble with one, let alone three.

His right foot came down hard on the instep of the guard. Simultaneously he twisted and threw an elbow to the ribs. Despite a hard stomach, no doubt strengthened by years of training, the Oriental let out a whoosh of air as his lowest rib cracked.

The redhead started to throw a right to finish the man off when another stick caught him above the left ear. Knocked off balance, he felt another blow, this time to his rib cage. He went to the terrazo floor of the veranda.

Lying there and momentarily stunned, he spotted the dropped staff. A blow struck the small of his back as he rolled over to protect himself, but he fought through the pain and brought up the retrieved staff.

A nunchaku flashed toward his face, but bounced off the staff. When the next blow came, Shayne let the wood wrap itself around his stick and then he yanked, pulling the adversary toward him. The Oriental was stopped in mid-flight when the redhead greeted him with a locomotive right.

Shaking his head, the big detective got to his feet. Something sharp poked him between the shoulder blades.

"If you even breathe deeply, you're going to have a hole in you that'll let it all out."

Shayne looked over. A muscular Oriental with tinges of gray in his coarse, black hair stood where the sliding door had been.

And behind the imposing figure, slightly to the right, the redhead

saw the beautiful face of the woman called Jade.

VII

SHAYNE DIDN'T KNOW A WHOLE LOT ABOUT ETHNOLOGY, but he could tell the Oriental before him was different. His skin had a slight yellow tinge and he looked a bit taller. One thing the detective knew for sure — the man may not have been pure Vietnamese, but from his snake-like eyes, his calloused hands, and the way he held his body, he was 100% killer.

"Chou. Nyu. Take this intruder away till I finish my business." He stared at Shayne with the blood-lust of a rabid wolf. "When I am done, perhaps I will amuse myself with him."

Deft hands patted the redhead down, removing his belt, his shoes, and his Smith & Wesson. Two knives urged him down the same hallway toward a small room. Shayne looked back to see Jade's right arm turned white under the brutal grasp of the Oriental.

The redhead was shoved into a closet and locked in. The Oriental was Ho Lu, he thought as he sat down in the darkness to conserve his strength. His back ached from the wooden staffs, and his knuckles were raw. If he got out of this one, he promised himself he was going to take a course in the martial arts. When he had gotten into the business, two good fists were enough, but now even the street punks knew karate or kung fu.

Earlier Shayne had questioned how any man could be capable of brutalizing another. One look at his captor had given him the answer. The Oriental appeared not only capable of killing, but also of doing it with relish. Such men had to be stopped.

What was Ho Lu's connection with the men of Alpha Company? Their whole attitude had changed when they heard his name. It had to be more than his arranging their Sergeant's "marriage" to Jade. And what was Ho Lu's business? Was it killing the remaining members of Alpha Company? If so, how did the guy at the computer fit in and why the urgency?

Shayne felt around the dark closet. The walls had been reinforced and the door was one of the newer steel security jobs. He reached up to the lock, but there was nothing on the inside. No way to pick it. His only chance to get away would come when somebody opened the door. The redhead relaxed his body, saving his energy for that decisive moment.

SHAYNE WAS THINKING ABOUT LAM DUC'S COMMENT ON THE double solution when he heard a thud outside. Then the metal bar was lifted from in front of the door.

Shayne crouched, ready to spring. This could be his one opportunity to escape, and he wasn't about to blow it.

When the first shaft of light sliced into the darkness, the big redhead threw his weight against the metal. The door flew open and a figure fell back.

The detective leaped out. His dilated pupils trying desperately to adjust to the light, he glanced around.

On the floor to the left lay a white-suited guard. In front of him, thrown backwards into the wall by the force of Shayne's shoulder, slumped Jade.

Cautiously Shayne knelt down and felt the man's pulse, all the while keeping his eyes trained on the beautiful woman.

No pulse.

"Doku," she said emotionlessly. "Ho Lu's favorite poison works against his men as well as his enemies."

Jade's tightly fitting, red silk dress accented her exquisite figure as she moved toward Shayne. She had a sexiness about her, Shayne thought, even when she wasn't trying.

"Quickly," she said, "we must go."

Shayne wasn't sure whether he was being set up, but anything offered a greater chance for freedom than a locked closet.

The two peered cautiously down the hallway. In a few seconds they had crossed it to a large room.

The detective shut the door. "So Ho Lu uses poison," he said.

"He has been trained to kill in many ways."

Shayne opened a window. "Then he is a ninja."

"Yes," she said. "The best now alive. He was trained in the mountains of North Vietnam by some priests whose sect was outlawed for its savagery and driven from Japan many years ago."

Shayne helped her out the window.

"Their descendants," she whispered, "fathered him and trained him in ninjutsu, the art of stealth. Their ryu, or school, like all our systems of fighting, is modeled on a creature of nature. The oriental priests based their style on their deadliest enemy, the preying wolf."

The detective recalled his assessment of Ho Lu's heritage as they crept behind the ground cover.

Jade continued, "When he mastered the priest's techniques, both physical and mystical, he was given the name Ho Lu, which in the original dialect of the priests means 'He-Wolf.' "

Shayne took her hand and led her across the lawn toward the wall. No guards were in sight, but the detective was wary for any attack.

"Now he is like a *ronin*, a masterless samurai," she said as they reached the border thicket. "Ho Lu was so brutal that even the renegade priests exiled him from their temple, but the mark was his. Today even his closest followers fear him, for they believe he is indeed part wolf."

As Shayne recalled the slaughtered bodies, he could almost believe it himself, and certainly the way Ho Lu could appear and disappear at will seemed almost occult.

The redhead took the hand of the small woman and headed for the wall. "What is this business Ho Lu is doing and why is he killing the soldiers?"

Shayne heard the whoosh gradually. It was as though someone had switched on a huge paddle fan. Jade turned toward the sound and stared mesmerically at it.

The redhead started to push her aside when it struck. A gleaming ax-head on a rope buried itself between her breasts.

Shayne looked toward the house as she collapsed in his arms. Standing there in a black shirt and pants and with a cowl wrapped around the lower part of his face was a ninja.

The redhead recognized the ebon eyes immediately. Even at that distance the mocking intensity in them could belong only to Ho Lu.

"Go," she gasped.

"We can . . ."

"Go now," she coughed. "He is dangerous and you must hunt him down. Surely only an animal would kill his own daughter."

VIII

SHAYNE SUCKED DEEPLY ON THE CAMEL AS HE STARED through the one-way mirror into the Interrogation Room. Flynn, Fisher, Boyd, Rainey, and Baker slumped over the long table with weeds dangling from their lips. Their posture as well as the dejected looks on their faces told Shayne that their patience was drifting away like the smoke from their cigarettes.

He had vaulted the wall before the ninja could use another weapon from his arsenal of death. That he had run, that he had left Jade there dying, that he had not gone back immediately ate at his gut. Oh, logically he knew that he had no chance against Ho Lu and his guards, but there were times when reason didn't cut it.

The bulldog figure slammed open the door. Chewing on the unlit black cigar, Will Gentry growled, "Damn it, Mike. You were right. I got Painter to send a black-and-white over, but of course all they found

was an upstanding Oriental businessman preparing for a conference and no body."

Shayne glanced out the window at Miami in the twilight. A man like Ho Lu could have disposed of Jade's body in a thousand ways during the time it had taken the redhead to get to a phone and get the police on it. One thing the detective knew: that afternoon there had been five men wanting to get Ho Lu — now there were six.

Behind Shayne, Gentry pounded his pudgy fist against his tree-stump thigh. "Those guys aren't going to sit in there forever. I've calmed them down a bit, but it won't last. I can't nursemaid them against their will."

Ignoring the foul smell of Gentry's day-old cigar, Shayne got right in his friend's face. "Will, there's got to be something you can do about Ho Lu. You saw the bodies."

Gentry returned Shayne's glare. "You've been working with me long enough to know if there was anything I could do, I would. But the police can go just so far. Hell, Mike, I'd cut a few corners if I had a single shred of evidence against this Ho Lu, but I still represent the law. I just can't send a SWAT team out of my jurisdiction to shoot it out with a suspect. If the police don't operate by the rules, what separates us from the animals?"

Shayne stubbed out the Camel viciously. He knew his old friend was right. There were laws the police had to operate by. Still, something had to be done, and fast.

"You mind going down the hall for a cup of coffee, Will?"

"You're up to something," said the Chief, raising his rumpled eyelids. "What is it?"

"You're a policeman," said Shayne. "You don't want to know about it."

AS THE REDHEAD PULLED THE BUICK OUT OF THE CON BRIO parking lot where they had collected some necessary things, he looked up at the night sky. Clouds swirled around the moon, and a few drops spit on the windshield. It was still hurricane season, and a storm was coming.

Glancing into the mirror, the redhead noticed all the pensive faces. He was glad they were all together and had been since leaving the police station. Little things about this case, if he could call it that, had been bothering him like the gnats that keep you from enjoying a day of fishing. Before leaving Will's office, he had called Rourke and had him check out something in his apartment. The reporter's return call, catching the detective leaving the hotel, had sure enough confirmed

his hunch.

"Before we get there," said the redhead, "there's one thing you're going to tell me. What happened in Nam between you and Ho Lu?"

Silence.

Shayne hit the brakes in the midst of the Causeway. "I'm getting damned tired of this sanctimonious attitude of yours that anybody who wasn't over there is somehow the lesser. You spent last night telling me that all the stereotypes of the Vietnam vet are wrong, but then you show me the next day some of them are right. What's it going to be?"

Baker slammed the seat behind the redhead. "Where do you get off preaching to us? You weren't there."

"That's just it," said the detective as a car behind honked and passed. "What you seem to want is for everybody who wasn't there to feel guilty. Well, pal, that just doesn't wash."

"Then maybe," said Rainey, "we ought to make a clean break. Come on, guys. Let's get out of here and leave this civilian alone."

IN THE DISTANCE SHAYNE HEARD THE RUMBLE OF COMING thunder. A car swerved on the now-slick pavement to avoid them. The redhead knew he was in the midst of a dangerous situation.

Flynn spoke up. "Hold on, Flash. We're all civilians now, and Shayne's got a point. Besides, how many men would lay their life on the line for guys they've known less than a day?"

"Shayne's got a right to know about Ho Lu," said Boyd. "You don't send a fighter into a *kumite* blindfolded."

"This is a man," said Fisher slowly, "who killed his own daughter."

Even these men had reflected shock when Shayne had explained that the woman who had been involved with their sergeant was actually the daughter of their hated enemy.

Flynn began, "It looks like we're in the middle of the bridge. There's no turning back now."

Shayne stepped on the accelerator, and the Buick lurched toward the liquid lights of Miami Beach.

The squad leader continued as they moved through the increasing rainfall. "We've never said much about it, but the reason we were captured that time by the North Vietnamese is that Suggs, our point man, was so strung out on horse he led us into an ambush. When the Sarge got us out after a week of torture, we swore we'd get the person responsible for what we learned was Suggs' habit."

"Yeah," interrupted Boyd, "we'd known about Dickie doing drugs at the Capitol Hotel when he got a pass. Nobody cared what he did in Saigon, but drugs were taboo in the field, a real number ten."

"Anyway, when we got back to camp," said Fisher, "we organized a search-and-destroy mission."

"A little American green and a few broken heads later we had the source," said Rainey.

"Ho Lu," said Shayne.

"After we *discussed* the evils of drug abuse with some of Ho Lu's flunkies," said Baker, "we turned over the pieces to the M.P.'s."

Flynn said, "We understood that Ho Lu sat out the rest of the war and was put away for awhile. Except in my nightmares, I hadn't thought of him for almost ten years."

As lightning tore apart the night sky, the detective had the missing piece.

Ho Lu was only a bad memory for four of them, but not for the fifth.

One of the squad members was a traitor.

IX

THE SEPTEMBER RAIN CAME OFF THE OCEAN IN WAVES. Shayne felt the weather was a good break, for Ho Lu would certainly be expecting them, and the thick sheets of water would provide excellent cover. Alpha Company had another advantage too. Each member carried an arsenal of weapons, ranging from M16's to grenades, but while the redhead had been inside Ho Lu's house he had not seen a Western-style weapon.

Shayne had counted four white-suits plus Ho Lu. They would have to guess from which side the attack would come. Flynn, realizing that the last thing they would expect would be an attack from all sides, had positioned a soldier at each corner of the yard.

Shayne rolled back the sleeve of the dark rain parka he had taken from the back of the Buick and checked his watch. 10:29. One minute to H hour. Lightning lit up the sky, making the redhead glad he had also opted for lamp-black across his face.

He tensed himself behind the sea wall. If the two guards were still there he would be coming up between them. He kept his eye on the bushes to the right. Behind them the traitor had been positioned. None of Alpha had communication equipment, so the only way Ho Lu could be alerted was if the traitor made a premature move.

If he did, Shayne had made up his mind to drop him on the spot.

10:30. He watched the traitor go over the wall and then followed him in. No interference. No guards. Light shone from inside, and Shayne knew instinctively that the ninja would not have fled, would not have missed this opportunity to finish off his enemies. In fact, he wondered if Ho Lu had been trying to draw the men of Alpha Company to him, to do battle on his terms.

A strange thought shivered Shayne. Had the ninja, having seen Shayne at the soldiers' hotel, let him escape to bring back the men?

It also bothered the redhead as he loped across the wet bermuda grass that he encountered no resistance. Ninjas were assassins, not protectors. He expected Ho Lu to counterattack.

A sharp howl rose from the house. On a trip to Texas Shayne had run across a similar sound, the cry of a coyote, and it had stampeded cattle.

As the screech pierced him, Shayne knew Ho Lu was waiting.

A RIFLE BARRAGE GREETED THE CRY. SUDDENLY A FLARE went off, and another gun chattered.

Shayne lost sight of the traitor as he reached the ground cover. No matter. The detective had made the decision earlier — the traitor, even Ho Lu, would have to wait. Besides, he had a funny feeling about what would happen when the chips were down.

And something more important needed doing.

The redhead inched along the wall till he came to the same window he had first discovered in the afternoon.

Something exploded in front of the house.

Shayne crept through the window. Reynolds, oblivious to the outside commotion, stared at his monitor like a kid into a video game and all the while tapped on his keyboard.

"I'll say it once," barked the redhead. "I want that program."

The operator was the one person in the house not a fighter. Quickly he did what Shayne had told him, handing the detective a package.

Shayne slipped it into the rainproof pocket of his parka, confident that Jones and Pegasus, the two agents from the ONI he had met a few months back in the Black Death spyplane affair, could decipher it.

The howl, this time a little closer, cut through the night. It was Ho Lu.

"Shayne, for so they tell me you are called, if you do not meet me where last you saw me, I will kill each of your friends and take a long time in so doing."

So the ninja had set him up. In one fatal swoop, Ho Lu would eliminate the rest of Alpha Company and get back to his urgent business.

Shayne stepped through the still-broken sliding door and onto the veranda. Lightning flashes illuminated the wet yard. Surrounded by dripping foliage it looked like a macabre arena.

Four bound figures knelt on the grass. The dark ninja stood behind them. A jagged fork ripped the night sky, and light gleamed from his eyes and the huge claws where most men had hands.

"Drop your gun, Shayne. Before you can shoot me, I can slit all four

throats."

Two things bothered Shayne — where were the guards and the traitor?

"I sent my men on ahead," said Ho Lu.

Shayne didn't pause to reflect on how the ninja seemed to read his mind. He drew the Smith & Wesson. What choice did he have?

"I never saw him," said Flynn, "and he had me."

"Like lambs to the slaughter," said Ho Lu with a laugh that struck the detective as inhuman. "I believe you have something of mine, Mr. Shayne."

"You want it," said the redhead. "You take it."

"I'll kill them first."

"The world's greatest ninja has to threaten the lives of helpless lambs to get what he wants?"

Shayne heard movement in the brush behind him. "You can come out of the bushes, Fisher."

The traitor stepped from behind the bougainvillea.

"Ben?" said Flynn, seeing the M-16 pointed in their direction.

"What the hell's going on?" said Baker.

"I couldn't tell you guys," said Shayne. "I knew you'd never believe it. He had to expose himself. One question, Ho Lu. How did you get Fisher on your side?"

The ninja emitted a high cackle. "Why not? My friends in the Cong told me how that brave American soldier who has been hiding in the brush broke down under torture and agreed to tell them anything they wanted to know. It was not difficult later to blackmail him, even from prison. But now we must hurry. The police will arrive soon."

Fisher leveled his M-16 at the ninja. "I've done too much wrong already. I can't let you kill again."

Even Shayne was shocked at the speed with which the dark-clad warrior snatched a shuriken from his belt and hurled it. Like a deadly frisbee, it cut through the night air, catching the startled soldier in the throat.

The redhead was even more shocked when he turned back from the victim with his .38 and the ninja was gone.

Shayne pivoted toward the brush.

The blow came without warning. Like a piece of steel descending on his wrist.

The Smith & Wesson plopped into the sand, and his wrist throbbed.

Shayne scanned the scene.

"Over here," came a voice from the house.

The redhead looked down for his gun, but it had disappeared.

A weapon, he needed a weapon.

Shayne broke for the veranda.

A shuriken sliced through his sleeve, just missing flesh.

"Shayne, you are too easy a target."

The big redhead knew the ninja was toying with him.

A dart thudded into a nearby post that held up the veranda roof.

Shayne was down on all fours instantly. He needed an edge. He groped around. Bingo. A staff still lay there, left behind from this afternoon's encounter. He rose with it.

A low growl came from the underbrush.

Shayne turned.

A shadow sprang at him, landing on the table just beside.

A hand flashed and the shaft shattered in two.

Shayne stabbed forward with the shaft's jagged edges and struck something.

The ninja fell backward. "Aha," he said, "the lamb has become a lion. So much the better."

The detective threw the broken stick at him.

At the last second Ho Lu stepped aside and caught the pointed missile.

Shayne recalled Boyd's comment about all other martial artists being costumed clowns. It was an understatement. He had never encountered an opponent so quick, so clever, so deadly.

The ninja rose up under the veranda's light. For the first time Shayne could see his opponent's hands clearly.

What scared the redhead the most was that the two-inch claws seemed to grow from his hands.

What was he fighting, man or animal?

THE NINJA CAME TOWARD HIM, THE CLAWS SLICING through the night air in some sort of practiced ritual.

"It is time," said Ho Lu. His eyes burned like embers in the night.

Shayne retreated through the doorway. As they backed into the room that had been redecorated, the big redhead tripped over a circular saw that had been left.

Lying on his back, Shayne saw Ho Lu pounce like a black wolf.

The redhead threw up his feet, catching his attacker in the midsection and flipping him into a bookcase.

Ho Lu's clawed right hand dug deeply into an empty shelf. Like an animal, its paw caught in a trap, he jerked back.

The shelf gave and he stumbled toward Shayne, his hand still stuck in the board.

Instinctively Shayne grabbed the saw and pressed the button.
The tool whirred to life.

The ninja swung the boarded hand viciously. Shayne stepped on the shelf, and with a singular motion ripped the whining blade across the caught hand.

A scream like nothing Shayne had ever heard erupted.
Blood spurted over the white-covered furniture.

"My hand," yelled Ho Lu, reaching down and picking up the severed member still stuck in the wood. "You will pay. You will pay."

Most men would have gone into shock instantly, but the ninja pivoted and sped into the night.

Shayne followed him into the yard.
"The wall," yelled Flynn.

Shayne shot a glance at the seawall. As the full moon broke from behind a dark cloud, he could have sworn he saw a huge, dog-like creature bound toward it and leap over.

He felt a chill. It must have been the cold, wet night. With all its speed, the animal had a pronounced limp.

X

IT ENDED WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.

The four remaining members of Alpha Company sat in Rourke's living room with Shayne. The long night was nearly over. Through Will Gentry's intervention, the necessary interview with Painter's investigators had been postponed until later in the day. The Naval courier from Pegas and Jones had arrived and picked up the computer software. Shayne had explained what had happened, the ONI agents had made a few calls, and soon they had a pretty good scenario about what the detective had uncovered.

Flynn threw down another Martell. "Good stuff," he said, "but it's still so hard to believe 'Gentle Ben' would betray us."

"How do you train a man to withstand torture?" said Shayne. "You never know how you can handle something like that till it happens."

"And," said Rourke, "when it really counted, Fisher stood tall."

Rainey said, "How did you first get on to him?"

"You guys mentioned that Fisher wasn't the brightest in the world, yet he had started and headed a high-profile computer company."

"How did he do that?" asked Baker.

"I think when they go over Fisher's books, they'll find he had an angel bankrolling him from behind bars."

"Ho Lu," said Boyd. "I suppose knowing that a G.I. had gone over gave that damned Oriental the leverage he needed."

Shayne said, "He even got Fisher to send all you guys telegrams to

get you here."

"How'd you figure that out?" said Rainey.

"Yesterday afternoon," said Rourke, "the shamus had me retrieve that telegram you wadded up and tossed on the floor."

The redhead laughed as he gestured around the junk-laden room. "Nothing ever gets thrown away around here."

"I found out," continued the reporter, "from some friends in the telegraph office that the telegrams had been charged to SunCoast Instruments, Fisher's company."

"What really tipped me off," said Shayne, "was something Boyd pointed out — if you meet a ninja, you're dead. Well, why was Fisher spared in that attack that killed Tulley and Tartabull?"

"What was Ben involved in?" said Flynn.

"Remember yesterday when Baker joked about Fisher's Pentagon contract? What my friends at ONI believe is that SunCoast had some kind of deal to develop software for the Pentagon's Personnel Department. On the surface, fine. What Ho Lu had in mind and what they think I discovered was that deeply embedded in the program was an access code that would open up the Pentagon's more important computers to anyone who had the code."

Rainey whistled. "Think what a crud like Ho Lu could have gotten for those secrets."

Baker took one of Shayne's Camels and asked, "Why did Ho Lu want to get us together? Why not kill us off individually?"

The redhead fired up a butt, fighting off the tiredness that swept through him. "I guess his hatred the day you turned him in. His twisted mind felt your pain would multiply if he got you while you were in the seeming security of the group, if you had to watch each other die."

"With ninjas, personal honor is everything," said Boyd.

Shayne added, "In the midst of the biggest scheme of his life, he was willing to risk it all when Haggard's fate gave him a chance to get you."

"I'll never understand," said Baker, "how a man could sacrifice his own daughter to satisfy some crazy need for revenge."

Shayne exhaled deliberately. "If you're willing to put your teenage daughter on the streets and kill her slowly, it's not such a big step to kill her quickly, especially if she gets in your way."

For awhile the six men sat and stared. Each found it difficult to look the others in the face.

"Well," said Boyd, "I'm gonna bring it up. If you think I'm nuts, so be it."

"I know what you're gonna say, Mad Dog," said Flynn.

"You . . . you saw it too," said Baker.

"Shayne," said Rainey, "you're good at explaining things. So tell us, last night in the midst of the rain, what was that animal that limped into the darkness?"

Shayne just shook his head at that one.

Rourke filled up everybody's glass. Shayne could feel the adrenalin seeping away.

Flynn rose and raised his glass. "Here's to fallen comrades, and," he added, looking at the two Irishmen, "here's to new ones."

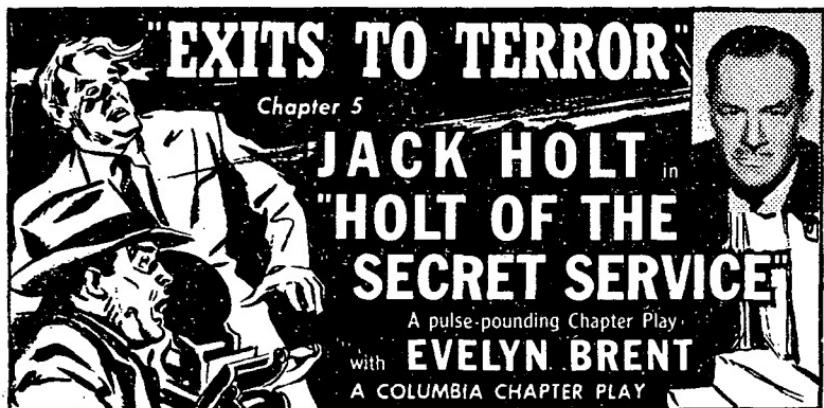
"Welcome to Alpha Company," they said in unison.

Shayne nodded. He had been thanked many ways in his time, but after what he had gone through with these men, no tribute had ever been more meaningful.

Before he fell asleep, the redhead had one more thing to do. He walked over to a window.

The first bright ray broke over the horizon. He watched it with a new appreciation as he recalled what Tartabull had said about seeing it every morning since he had escaped from death.

At that moment Shayne had never felt more alive. •



The murder method was particularly appropriate and blasphemous. It was Easter Sunday, and the victim's body was attached to a cross with spikes driven through his hands and feet!

The Crucifixion

by MEL D. AMES

THE REVEREND RUSSELL I.P. PHINNEY, BETTER KNOWN AS *Rest-In-Peace* Phinney to his parishioners (and *I.P. Funny* to the unrevering youngfolk), had never before failed to enjoy the short, early morning walk to his beloved church.

The rectory was situated well back on the expansive church property, and it was from there that he would happily wend his way each day, down through the trees to the stone-and-cedar grandeur of St. Cuthbert's, where it fronted on one of Metro's busiest thoroughfares. Few moments had given the Reverend greater pleasure than when, as he rounded the last turn in the driveway, the giant wooden cross that rose so solemnly before the entrance to the church, would suddenly spring into view.

On this particular morning, being Easter Sunday, the Reverend Phinney was feeling doubly blessed. So great, in fact, was his euphoria as he maneuvered that last rewarding turn, that it took a full minute of stunned ogling before he could fully comprehend the tableau of horror that the Devil (who else?) had so cruelly wrought upon his church. For there (*God save us!*) on the hitherto empty face of the

towering cross, *the body of a mortal man, clad in nothing but his own body hair, hung from three spikes that had been brutally driven through his hands and feet.*

It was, the Reverend Phinney later adjudged, the most blatant, blasphemous mockery of the Holy Crucifixion he had ever had the misfortune to witness.

THE SUN HAD NOT YET RISEN ABOVE THE TREES WHEN Detective-Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers, chauffeured by her inseparable cohort, Detective-Sergeant Mark Swanson, drew up before the ecclesiastical elegance of St. Cuthbert's Church. The massive cross with its human adornment, looked, from where they had parked at the curb, like nothing more spectacular than an intended, life-like, life-size, replica of the Holy Crucifixion. No crowd had gathered to gawk at the outrageous sacrilege, and the Sunday morning traffic continued to bustle back and forth, innocently oblivious to it.

"I'll be damned." Mark's ruggedly handsome face monitored his awe as he emerged from the unmarked Chevy. "Talk about your pinups."

The lieutenant stood eyeing the bizarre scene for some moments in undisguised amazement, "I thought I'd seen everything, Mark, but this is utterly maniacal. What do you suppose is the point of it?"

Mark rolled his eyes heavenward in what was meant to be pious contemplation. "Well, I doubt very much that he's up there counting Volkswagens, lieutenant, and, frankly, I can think of better ways to get a suntan — "

"Your sense of humor, Mark, can be positively obscene at times." She gave him a dark look of reproach. "It wouldn't surprise me to see you goofing off at your own funeral."

Mark grinned. "How about a bumper sticker on the coffin, that reads: *Pardon me for not rising.*"

The lieutenant laughed in spite of herself. "Mark, you're incurable." She glanced back at the man on the cross and quickly sobered. "Get on the radio, Mark, and have Dispatch requisition a firetruck, P.D.Q. That's Pretty Damn Quick, in case you're in doubt. Make sure they send a truck with a ladder. That guy must be over twenty feet up there. And you'd better alert the meat squad. I want the lab and camera crews on that cross before any attempt is made to get the body down."

"You got it, lieutenant." Mark reached for the radio-mike but his eyes never left his senior partner as she turned and headed out across the church lawn toward the cross. His gaze lingered on her receding silhouette with fond reflection.

OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, MARK HAD WATCHED Cathy Carruthers evolve into something of a living legend at Metro Central's Eleventh Precinct; a remarkably beautiful, six-foot, honey-haired blonde, possessing all the sexual attributes of a *Penthouse* pinup, with a hidden reservoir of such awesome strength and intelligence that she had been nicknamed "The Amazon" by her incredulous colleagues in Homicide. They had become an effective team, she and Mark, and a deep bond of mutual respect and affection had developed between them.

Following a couple of terse moments with the dispatcher, Mark took off after the lieutenant. A lone, black-robed figure had joined her at the foot of the cross, and as he drew within earshot, Mark heard his partner identify herself, then flash her badge. "And this," she said, as Mark drew abreast of them, "is my partner, Sergeant Swanson."

"I am Reverend Russell I.P. Phinney," the man in the black cassock responded. "I am the person who phoned."

"Do you know the identity of the man on the cross, Mr. Phinney?"

"Reverend."

"Pardon me?"

"Reverend Phinney," the man insisted. "I am a Reverend; I am not a Mister."

"And I am not a hypocrite," the lieutenant replied coolly. "While I respect your right to practice your own religion as you see fit, Mr. Phinney, I feel under no obligation to cower before another mere mortal in mock reverence. Now, will you kindly answer the question: Do you know the man on the cross?"

"Uh, yes — lieutenant, I do." The Reverend was visibly discomfited by Cathy Carruthers' rather blunt assessment of his secular status. "That is Kevin LeMay up there. He is (or was) a member of my parish. I assume he is dead."

"You assume correctly. Now, have you any idea who might have put him up there?"

"None whatever."

"Or why anyone would want to?"

"None wha — uh, well, lieutenant, to be perfectly candid, he was reputed to be something of a — lady's man?"

"That, Leverend, would be putting it mildry."

THE VOICE HAD COME FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE church. All heads turned to see a slight man of Japanese extraction emerging from the cathedral-like entrance. And following subserviently three feet behind him, was an even tinier, doll-like woman of

milar cast. The eyes of the woman were focused unwaveringly on the round.

The man, with his one-woman entourage in tow, approached the roup at the foot of the cross. He squinted up at them through thick-immed glasses that looked like the bottoms of empty Coke bottles. "A rotten bastard," he said emphatically, "would be a more fitting escription."

"Perhaps you'd like to identify yourself," the lieutenant said with some amusement.

"My name is Ouchi. Yosh Ouchi." He pointed a tiny thumb over one houlder. "My wife, Tomi."

"Yosh is our caretaker," the Reverend Phinney explained. "And Tomi plays the organ for us. They are both a credit to St. Cuthbert's, ieutenant."

"I'm sure. How long have you been back there listening to us, Mr. Ouchi?" the lieutenant asked the upturned Coke bottles.

"We arrived just after the leverend, rieutenant. We were with him when he phoned the porice."

"That is correct," the reverend attested.

"Well, then, what can you tell me about the man on the cross?" The lieutenant directed her question to the little man's wife, who seemed to be on an invisible leash. "Mrs. Ouchi?"

The tiny woman shot a fearful glance at the lieutenant, at her husband, then back down at the ground. She was actually quite pretty, the lieutenant noted, and at least twenty years younger than her domineering spouse.

"Tomi would not know of these things," Yosh Ouchi put in quickly. "But I can tell you that Kevin ReMay was intimate with many radies in the church. And their husbands were vely angly."

"You saw them?"

"Yes, rieutenant, I saw them."

"And where did these trysts occur?"

In ReMay's looms."

"You were there, in his loo — rooms, when this happened?"

"No, rieutenant, but I did see them go in, and I heard — evelything."

"Perhaps I can elaborate, lieutenant," the reverend offered. "Yosh had already told me, in some detail, of these — indiscretions. LeMay, you see, was Resident Church-Activities Director, and had been for more than a year. He occupied a small apartment that is attached to the equipment garage where Yosh has a workshop. I gather, from what Yosh has told me, that the walls are rather thin — "

"And just what *did* he tell you?"

"He told me, lieutenant, that he had seen ladies from the congregation enter LeMay's apartment, alone with him, on several occasions. When I asked for specifics, he recited two instances, and named two married ladies, that he claims had definitely been in — in dalliance with the man."

"*In dalliance?*"

"They made *rove!*!" the little oriental stated unequivocally.

"Yes — well," the reverend continued, "to make matters worse, if that were possible, both of these ladies were then seen leaving the apartment by their respective husbands, who had apparently come looking for them. As Yosh tells it, it resulted in a couple of rather ugly scenes — and even uglier threats."

"I see." The lieutenant regarded the little man speculatively for several moments. "Mr. Ouchi," she said at last. "I want you to convey that same information to Sergeant Swanson, in every detail, and, of course, anything else you might have seen or heard that may be pertinent to the case. I want names, times, dates, and addresses, relevant to all parties involved. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir, *rieutenant.*"

A HALF DOZEN POLICE CARS SUDDENLY APPEARED ON THE scene with lights flashing. Moments later, a lone fire truck mounted the curb and came rumbling across the lawn toward the cross. Ouchi watched in dismay as the heavy wheels pressed ruts into the otherwise unmarked carpet of the grass. Mark hauled out his notebook and steered the little oriental to one side, while his petite mate perpetuated her peripheral presence as though she'd been linked umbilically.

The lieutenant, meanwhile, had cornered the head man in the fire crew. "I want my forensic team up there before you attempt to salvage the cadaver," the lieutenant told him. "And they're going to need your help."

"Not to worry, lieutenant. We'll float 'em up and down that cross like they'd just sprouted wings. But hadn't we better check to see if the guy's dead?"

The lieutenant smiled condescendingly as she pointed up at the sagging corpse. "You've probably already noticed the marked absence of bleeding, right? Only traces of blood on his hands, and his feet, where the spikes were driven in. It seems rather obvious, doesn't it, that his heart had stopped pumping *before* he was nailed up there. That man, I'm afraid, is as dead as he's ever going to get."

"Yeah, I guess he is at that." The fireman committed Cathy Car-

ruthers' engaging rear-end to memory as she walked away to rejoin the Reverend Phinney near the entrance to the church. "I hate smart broads," he mumbled to himself, "especially good looking ones."

At her own request, while the police teams busied themselves at the scene of the crucifixion, the lieutenant accompanied the Reverend Phinney on a hasty tour of the church. They went to LeMay's apartment, where the lieutenant retrieved an apple core from the garbage pail, and a small black notebook from a dresser drawer. In the garage where Yosh Ouchi had his workshop, she stopped to run an immaculately manicured finger over grass stains on the base clamps of an aluminum extension ladder, noting that the ladder, when fully extended, would measure more than thirty feet. And the top rung of the ladder appeared to be shinier than the others, as though someone had deliberately burnished it. Then, in the wall that separated the garage from the apartment, the lieutenant uncovered a cleverly concealed peephole that looked directly into what had been LeMay's bedroom.

It seemed that Yosh Ouchi, the lieutenant mused, had been into more than just listening, while his fellow parishioners had been "making rove."

WHEN THE LIEUTENANT AND THE REVEREND RETURNED TO the activity at the front of the church, the body of Kevin LeMay was sprawled grotesquely over the grass at the base of the cross, arms splayed and body cruelly bent, frozen in the grip of rigor mortis. Sam Morton, Metro Central's Chief Coroner, was crouched over the body.

"Any idea what killed him, Sam?"

The M.E. looked up with a humorless smile. "I take it you don't buy the crucifixion bit."

"You can say that again, Sam."

"I take it you don't buy the crucifixion bit."

The lieutenant narrowed her vivid blue eyes, her inscrutably beautiful face just inches from his grumpy smirk. "Mark's pathetic one-liners aren't enough," she told him with a tempered touch of malice, "now I've got you on my back?"

"As long as I haven't got you on the table, lieutenant, you've got nothing to worry about. And to answer your question, no, I don't know what killed him."

"Guess."

"Asphyxiation? Poison? Bubonic plague?"

"You're not being very helpful, Sam."

"Lieutenant, this guy's as stiff as the cross he was nailed to. I can't tell you much of anything until I get him in where I can do a number on

him. My guess is, he drew his last breath sometime around midnight. There are no outward signs of violence, apart from being hung up to dry, of course. But, as you've already surmised, that came later."

"How much later?"

The M.E. drew a sheet over the convoluted corpse and got stiffly to his feet. "Don't ask me."

"Who do you suggest I ask, Sam, the Easter Bunny?"

"Why not?" The coroner's customary furrowed frown seemed to contort itself almost painfully into a grouchy-looking grin. "Try him with, *What's up, Doc?* I get it all the time."

Before the lieutenant could respond, one of the men from the lab team suddenly stepped in front of her. He held up a small polybag. "This was stuck to the cross, lieutenant, just above the guy's head. It wasn't visible from the ground."

Inside the polybag, the lieutenant could see a strip of white paper. There was something printed on it in an awkward scrawl, with what seemed to be a red grease pencil. She held it up and read aloud: "THE WORKS OF THE FLESH ARE MANIFEST."

Over her shoulder, the Reverend Phinney said, "That's a quote, or partial quote, from Galatians, I think." He fumbled in his black cassock and produced a small black Bible. As he flipped through the pages, the lieutenant handed the message back to the lab man, together with the apple core and notebook she had taken from LeMay's apartment. They, too, were each protected by individual polybags.

"I'd like you people to check the dead man's apartment," she told him, "which is where this stuff came from. And you might have a look at the aluminum ladder that's hanging in the adjacent workshop. Mr. Phinney, here, will show you where to go."

The man looked around him. "You mean the *Reverend Phinney?*" he asked innocently enough.

The lieutenant treated him to a long, reflective look. "Let's not get into *that* again," she said menacingly. The man shrugged, and waited.

"Ah, yes, here it is," the reverend exclaimed triumphantly. "Galatians 5:19, 20 and 21 — *Now the works of the flesh are manifest,*" he read, "*which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies —*"

"Let me know," the lieutenant sighed wearily, "when you get to dalliance."

"— *envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*"

"Amen," said Yosh Ouchi, his Coke-bottle specs glinting with piety in the morning sun.

Mark shifted uncomfortably at the lieutenant's side. "Doesn't leave much room for a guy to maneuver, does it?"

Cathy Carruthers grinned. "It sure as hell cramps *your* style," she chuckled. "Have you finished with our little oriental snitch?"

"Yep." Mark held up his notebook. "It's all in here."

"Let's go then. I think we'll have better luck with the *Book Of Revelations* (according to Ouchi) than with the diatribe we've just been listening to."

TWO MINUTES LATER, MARK WAS BEHIND THE WHEEL OF the Chevy, one hand on the gearshift, motor running, ready to roll. His favorite sleuth-person had just climbed in beside him. "Where to, lieutenant?"

"Well, Mark, I don't think there's much doubt, at this point anyway, that our prime suspects have got to be the husbands of the two ladies who were caught coming out of LeMay's apartment. Clark Goodman and, uh — Nigel Stirling. They were both fiercely irate. With justification, perhaps, but they *did* make threats. I think we owe them both a visit, don't you?"

"Who do we start with?"

Mark watched Cathy Carruthers ponder the question silently for a few moments. He had become rather fond of watching her ponder. It wasn't what you'd call an arduous activity, but it had its thrills. It wasn't like watching grass grow.

"I think we'll begin with Nigel and Monica Stirling," she said at last. "You've got them down as owning and operating a peach orchard on the outskirts of Metro, off Interstate 5. It shouldn't be more than a half-hour drive."

Mark did a U-turn off the curb and headed out toward North Metro. He shot a quick glance at his partner. "Lieutenant, there's some information I picked up from Ouchi that I didn't put in the book. I think you should know about it."

"I'm listening."

"Reverend Phinney failed to mention it, but he's got an eighteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth. She lives at the rectory. Ouchi claims that the girl was one of LeMay's conquests. It's kind of sad because the kid was deluded into believing the guy really loved her. You know the scene. Anyway, Ouchi didn't want to say anything in front of Phinney for fear of upsetting him. The girl is the only family the reverend has left; his wife died of cancer a couple of years ago."

"Now that *is* interesting." The lieutenant leaned back with an esoteric chuckle. "Because, according to I.P. Phinney, Ouchi's wife, Tomi, was also one of LeMay's bed partners."

"My God! When did that guy sleep?"

"And here's something else: Ouchi was not only a witness to the comings and goings of LeMay's playmates, he was actually *watching* their amorous activities through a peephole in the bedroom/garage wall. He was undoubtedly having himself a fine old time (the little creep) with a real, live, porno-soap-opera going for him, until (chuckle) his own child-bride made her humble debut as the leading lady. He was, as they say, *Hoist by his own petard.*"

Mark laughed. "That must have been some finale." He braked the car to a running stop at a turn-off, then hung a right onto an on-ramp to Interstate 5. "What a case," he said. "Everyone we've talked to has become a viable suspect."

"That may be true, Mark, but remember there are three contingencies to murder: Motive, Means, and Opportunity. And by the simple process of elimination, just on those criteria alone, we should be able to rule out most of them. But that's not what's bothering me now."

"Oh? Then what is?"

"I just can't imagine how *one* person, even a trained and rugged, six-footer like yourself, Mark — "

"Don't forget handsome, and witty — "

"— and even with the aid of a good ladder, could drag a body up the face of that cross, and then go about pinning him up there like a tail on a donkey."

"Yeah, I see what you mean. But maybe it wasn't just one man, lieutenant. Maybe it was some kind of a conspiracy. You know, two or more people in cahoots, or even a lynch mob. God knows — by the time LeMay had met his somewhat appropriate end last night, there must have been as many cuckolds as sinners parked in their pews at St. Cuthbert's."

"You do have a way of putting things, Mark."

Mark kept the car hurtling down 5-North until they reached the Dry Valley turn-off. He slowed to maneuver the cloverleaf, then swung east at a more leisurely pace, winding down through a magnificent valley that virtually teemed with lush, budding orchards. The noise of the freeway had fallen away behind them, and they seemed to float along in a new, gentle quiet, stirred only by the hum of a distant tractor and the whispering *chu chu chu* of the sprinklers.

"Dry Valley Road," Mark said wonderingly. "What a ludicrous name for such a fertile valley."

"I agree, Mark, but this valley was named when there was nothing here but sagebrush and rattlesnakes. Irrigation water had to be flumed down from high-level reservoirs."

"Yeah? So how did they get the water up there in the first place?"

"To put it simply; the reservoirs are fed by a chain of small mountain tarns, which, in turn, are augmented by natural rainfall and the seasonal melting of a fairly reliable snowshed."

"I'm impressed, lieutenant. How come you know so much about irrigation?"

"I was born and raised on an orchard, Mark. I was driving a John Deere when most kids my age were still into kiddie cars."

At that point, a rural mailbox with the name STIRLING painted on its side, loomed up on their left, and Mark nosed the car into a long, gravel driveway.

"The trees are almost ready to blossom," the lieutenant noted absently; "the buds are just on the verge of erupting."

Mark chuckled grimly. "That's not all that's ready to erupt, lieutenant. Look ahead."

A HUGE, YELLOW AND GREEN DIESEL TRACTOR WAS ANGLED across the driveway, blocking their path. A red-headed man in coveralls occupied the bucket seat, vibrating slightly from the idling diesel, his face a clouded, sun-weathered mask of inhospitality.

"This here's private property," the man shouted. "Back up and get out!"

The lieutenant slipped out of the car and approached the tractor. Mark watched from behind the wheel as the lieutenant flashed her badge, identifying herself.

"Will you please shut that off!" she shouted over the noise of the diesel.

"I told you to back up and get out," the man shouted back. "Now move, b'fore you get hurt."

The lieutenant reached quickly in behind the dash and yanked at the shut-off knob. The tractor coughed and stalled, but because she had to hold the knob in the "out" position for two or three seconds, she could not avoid the vicious blow the man had aimed at her wrist.

Momentarily stunned, the lieutenant fell back a pace, but was on the verge of retaliating when Mark suddenly appeared on the other side of the tractor. The man's hand was already on the key to restart the motor, but a fist the size of a leg of mutton slammed into his biceps, just below the shoulder. The fingers on the end of the arm spread and stiffened in paralytic pain.

It was the lieutenant's turn then, to stand and watch as the orchardist was whipped out of his seat and unceremoniously dumped on his rump in the center of the driveway.

"You don't hear too well," Mark admonished the man quietly. "You gotta pay attention, sonny, when the lieutenant talks to you."

Cathy Carruthers turned her golden head to hide the wide grin she was unable to suppress. When she regained her composure, she said, "You are Nigel Stirling?"

The man nodded his head, then grunted in the affirmative as Mark nudged him with his toe.

The lieutenant grinned openly. "I'll back this mechanical brute up to the house and out of the way, Mark. You follow in the car. And, uh — bring sonny with you."

MARK WATCHED HIS BEAUTIFUL PARTNER MOUNT THE tractor like she'd done it more than once before. She had to hike her skirt to straddle the transmission hump, but once in the saddle, she got it rolling like a pro. With one hand on the steering wheel, the other on a fender to support her backward looking posture, she sent the green and yellow monster barreling back in a cloud of dust, to an open area beside the old clapboard house.

Nigel Stirling led them, reluctantly, through the back "mud-room" entrance, into a large country-style kitchen. A woman standing before the sink, turned as they entered. She had a plump, rosy face that was framed in a clump of tousled brown hair, and a figure that looked to have been nurtured on pork pie and peaches. If this was Monica Stirling, she was not what Mark had imagined an even quite-by-chance fornicatrix would have looked like. LeMay had obviously been willing to oblige most anything, as long as it was female and friendly.

"Are you Monica Stirling?" the lieutenant asked the woman.

"Yes, I am."

Mark found a kitchen stool to sit on as his partner went through the routine of identifying herself, and him, for the second time. "We're here about the death of Kevin LeMay," she said finally.

Monica cast a frightened look toward her husband, though to Mark, the man looked more comical than threatening. He was a thick-boned, stumbling lout of a man, with a wide mouth and a crop of wiry red hair that gave him the appearance of a clown without make-up. But there was an unmistakable fear, not amusement, reflected in the eyes of his disquieted wife.

"We were told about his death," Stirling mumbled, "jest a half hour ago."

"By phone?"

"Yeah."

"Who made the call?"

"Reveren' Phinney did."

"I see." The lieutenant did not appear particularly pleased. "You were, of course, both known to the deceased?"

"Yeah. He knew us." Stirling turned his eyes darkly in his wife's direction. "Both of us. And we knew him."

"On at least one occasion, Mr. Stirling, you were overheard to threaten —"

"You been talkin' to that little turd, Ouchi, have'n'cha? Anyhow, even if I did, that don't mean I killed 'im."

"No, it doesn't. But it does give you a motive. Are you able to account for your whereabouts at the time of the murder?"

"Now when'n hell might that have been?"

"Around midnight, give or take an hour."

"Midnight?" There was no humor in the man's sudden, ugly chortling. "I was right where you'd expect a farmer oughta be, lieutenant, mam."

"You didn't answer my question."

"In bed, damn it, In bloody bed. Where else?"

The lieutenant turned to the dumpy "Delilah." "And you, Mrs. Stirling?"

"I was with Nigel, of course."

"Of course." The lieutenant echoed the words with some ambivalence, and Monica Stirling's pudgy face suddenly took on the color of an over-ripe peach.

"Can you corroborate that?" the lieutenant asked.

"If that means can we prove it," Stirling grumbled, "the answer is, no. We're not in the habit of having strangers in bed with —"

He stopped in midsentence, clearly flustered by his own clumsy ineptness. And his wife's already flushed face deepened to a feverish, cherry red.

"Look, mam." Nigel Stirling seemed almost as unhappy as his hangdog spouse. "We told you where we was, and we told you where we wasn't. Now if you don't mind, I got an orchard to run —"

"Mr. Stirling." The lieutenant was patiently condescending. "I have only one more question for you, at this time: Do you own a cherry-picker?"

"A giraffe? Yeah, I got two of 'em. Don't pick no cherries with 'em though."

"Where are they now?"

"One's in my equipment shed. Other one I had to take into town, for repairs."

"When was that?"

Stirling shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "—uh, yesterday."

"Yesterday morning? Afternoon?"

The man hesitated. "Had to take it in last night," he said finally, "don't have no time durin' the day. Ain't nothin' wrong with that, is there?"

"You tell me," the lieutenant said from the door. "All I know is, it sure would have been one easy way to haul LeMay up that cross, *without the need of a ladder.*"

THEY HAD ALREADY MADE THE TURN AT THE END OF THE driveway, heading back the way they had come, along Dry Valley Road, before the lieutenant spoke. She sounded pensive.

"What do you make of that Stirling character, Mark?"

"I think the man is not only an unmitigated bully, lieutenant, but a stupid one. And that's the worst kind."

"But did he kill LeMay?"

"Who knows? He certainly had the motive, the means, *and* the opportunity. He qualifies."

"He does, indeed. But then, so does Ouchi and that perfidious parson."

"The reverend?"

"The same. I just wonder if he's tipped off the Goodmans, like he did the Stirlings?"

"Is that where we're heading?"

"Only if you can get this Detroit dinosaur out of low gear and into get-along. It's already after ten, and I'd like to squeeze in a workout at the Fitness Center before lunch. Feel up to it?"

"Are you kidding? Hang onto your seat!"

THE GOODMAN LIVED WITHIN A QUARTER MILE OF ST. Cuthbert's Church. The top floor of a two-story stucco building, housing Goodman's Arts & Signs, had quite obviously been converted into living quarters. Curtains, drapes and flower boxes adorned the upper windows. A door on one side of the storefront, gave access to an enclosed stairwell that led to the floor above.

Being Sunday, the business was closed, but Mark found a buzzer on the side door and thumbed it. A moment later an intercom squawked.

"Yeah?" A man's voice.

"Police," Mark intoned flatly. "We'd like to talk to you."

"How do I know you're cops?"

"You don't. And you won't, unless you come down here and let us identify ourselves."

"Just a minute."

A buzzer sounded, and the door lock clicked. Mark tugged the door open. "Couldn't have been all that leery," Mark muttered as he followed the lieutenant up the stairs, "letting us in like that, without checking."

"He was probably expecting us," the lieutenant said tightly. "Phinney the Fink strikes again."

A door opened at the top of the stairs and a man dressed in undershirt and jeans admitted them into a spacious living room. He was a thick-set man, about five-ten, with a sagging chest and stomach that was fast losing its fight with gravity. He looked to be about forty.

"I'm Lieutenant Carruthers, and this is my partner, Sergeant Swanson." The lieutenant flipped her badge as Mark looked around for a comfortable place to sit. "Are you Clark Goodman?"

"That's my name."

"We're here about the death of Kevin LeMay, Mr. Goodman."

"Yes, I know."

"The Reverend Phinney phoned you?"

"—uh, yes, he did. How'd you know?"

"Just a lucky guess." The lieutenant treated him to a secret smile. "Is your wife at home?"

"She'll be out in a minute. She's getting dressed." He ran his hand over his unshaven chin. "This is usually our day to sleep in."

"I was under the impression you attended St. Cuthbert's on Sunday mornings."

"We do, normally, but the service doesn't start until eleven. And today, after the phone call —"

"Mr. Goodman," the lieutenant cut in, "I have information that you had a rather unfriendly exchange of words with LeMay, after you discovered —"

"Damn!" Goodman's face had darkened. "You've been talking to that little Kamikaze creep, haven't you? Someone ought to crucify him!"

"You want to tell me about it?"

"What's to tell? You obviously know what went on. I just warned

LeMay to keep off my turf — or else.”

“Or else, what?”

“I don’t know.” Goodman sank down in the second most comfortable chair in the room; Mark was already occupying the first. “It hadn’t come to that.”

“You could have fooled me there, early this morning,” the lieutenant responded gravely.

A woman entered the room from a connecting passage. She had bleached-blond hair with black roots, and a figure not too different from her husband’s, except that it was female. *Right up LeMay’s libidinous alley*, Mark mused with an inward grimace.

“This is my wife, Goldie,” Goodman grunted. To her, he said, “They’re here about LeMay’s death.”

Goldie Goodman had a bruised left eye and a grazed cheek that a heavy application of make-up had not been able to hide.

“What happened to your face, Mrs. Goodman?”

The woman lifted a nervous hand to her cheek. “Why, I — I fell. The stairs — ”

“I hit her,” Goodman stated matter-of-factly, with no suggestion of remorse. “LeMay was an unqualified bastard, lieutenant, but it takes two to tango.”

“Yes, well, unless Mrs. Goodman wishes to file a complaint,” the lieutenant asserted, “it’s of no concern to me. What I do want to know, however, is where you were last night, around midnight.”

Goodman shrugged his meaty shoulders. “I had a late job last night that took me until 10:30, 11 o’clock. When I got home, Goldie and I killed a bottle of wine and went to bed.”

“And what was the nature of this ‘job?’ ”

“I had to erect a small sign, that’s all. At Prime Pizza Palace, over on South Main.”

“I presume you had with you, the necessary sign-erecting equipment?”

“Of course. It’s truck mounted. We couldn’t operate without it.”

“Did you have a helper?”

“You kidding? With overtime wages the way they are today? Who can afford it? Anyway, it wasn’t that tough a job.”

“The lieutenant drew a stray fall of golden hair from her forehead. “How high will that equipment of yours lift, Mr. Goodman?”

“Thirty-five, forty feet. High enough.”

“Yes,” the lieutenant agreed, “high enough to lift the body of a man up a thirty-foot cross, wouldn’t you say?”

“You’re reaching, lieutenant,” Goodman snarled. “I’m not sorry to

see that raunchy bastard dead, and that's a fact, but I didn't kill him."

"I'd hardly expect you to admit it if you did," the lieutenant told him quietly, "but as the sergeant would likely say, *you do qualify.*"

AT 11:45, PRECISELY, MARK SWANSON STOOD WAITING IN THE inner hall of the Fitness Center, a facility provided for the exclusive use of Metro Central's law enforcement personnel. He was dressed in sneakers, shorts, and a sleeveless tank-top, revealing a powerful, sun-bronzed physique that drew double-takes from both sexes as they traversed the narrow hall between the gym and the locker rooms. Mark's eyes strayed repeatedly to a door with a block-letter sign that read: MUCHACHAS. On another door across the hall, behind which he had just changed out of his street clothes, a similar sign read: MUCHACHOS. He had often speculated on what delightful havoc might ensue if (one day) he was to surreptitiously switch the A on one sign, for the O on the other; and, of course, vice versa.

However, his wait (and therefore his speculation) on this particular day, was of short duration. Cathy Carruthers emerged from the MUCHACHAS side of the hall in a burst of energy; her abundant, honey-blonde hair drawn back in a ponytail that billowed and flew like a Cavalier's plume. She wore coal-black leotards and matching wool leg-warmers that came to just above her knees. A loose-fitting, white pullover completed her attire, and left her looking like a long-legged ballet dancer who'd outgrown her tutu.

"Well," she said brightly, "how do I look?"

Mark, who firmly believed (from the moment he had first set eyes on Cathy Carruthers) that there were eight, not seven, Wonders in the World, was momentarily speechless. He did finally manage something like, "Uh — great!"

"You don't sound too convincing," she laughed. She punched him playfully on a bulging bicep. "God, you're a big brute."

Before he could respond, playfully or otherwise, she had taken off toward the indoor track. Mark followed strategically three feet behind. He might have felt a little like Ouchi's tagtailing spouse, except that his eyes were not focused on the ground.

"Come up beside me, Mark," she called back over her shoulder, "I want to talk to you."

Mark, was not adverse to getting a little behind in his workout, acquiesced with some reluctance.

"What do you think about Phinney, Mark, phoning ahead of us like that?"

"Well, maybe there's something in this conspiracy theory after all. Phinney, Ouchi, Stirling, Goodman; all in it together. Except —"

"Except, what?"

"Except that both Stirling and Goodman have about as much use for Ouchi as a born-again Geisha."

"That may be true, Mark. but there's still three of them left with a credible, collective motive. And we still don't know how they (or he, for that matter; or even *she*) managed to get LeMay up on that cross — "

"Or, how he was killed to begin with."

"We're just going to have to wait, Mark, to see what the lab and Sam Morton come up with. And that probably won't be until sometime tomorrow. The way it looks now, we just don't have a leg to stand on."

Mark, who had been having trouble keeping his mind and his eyes above his partner's chin, could see no visible justification for her last remark.

"I'll race you the last lap," Mark challenged, "loser buys the lunch." And he surged ahead of her in a powerful, leg-pounding sprint. He was still in the lead and more than half way round the track, when a bionic blur went whistling by him like a black-and-white answering a Code 3. The only thing missing were the siren, flashing lights and (happily) a rear bumper.

MONDAY MORNING CAME AND WENT WITHOUT INCIDENT AT Metro Central's Eleventh Precinct. Lieutenant Carruthers kept close to the phone as she tackled the never-ending backlog of paperwork that strewed her desk. Mark was similarly engaged, just outside her glassed-in office; a necessary, but brutally boring task that kept him fidgeting like a hungry sinner at a soup-kitchen prayer meeting.

It was well past the noon hour when the long-awaited call came through from the lab. Mark rang it through to his senior partner without breaking his own connection.

"Carruthers."

"Brewster, here, lieutenant, from lab."

"Yes, corporal. You've got the report?"

"No, we'll need more time. But there are a couple of things developing that you may find interesting. Want to come down and talk about it?"

"Be there in five." The lieutenant caught Mark's eye through the glass-partition as she hung up the phone. "Let's go," she mouthed.

LENNY BREWSTER WAS BUILT LIKE A TEST TUBE. HIS SHORT, coal-black hair could have been mistaken for the business end of a Bunsen burner and his chalky, tight-lipped face looked more like a blank lab report than a human identity. For all that, Lenny Brewster was undeniably a prodigy of Forensic Chemistry. It was rumored in the department, that when he and Sam Morton got together, they could concoct a pepperoni pizza, if they felt so inclined, out of a week-old cow patty.

Lenny was at his laboratory bench when the lieutenant and Mark entered the lab, but he blended so well with his immediate surroundings that he was next to invisible — until he moved.

"Over here, lieutenant. Hi, Mark." He turned on his high, three-legged stool to face them. "They've sure dumped a weird one on you this time."

"What else is new?" the lieutenant said lamely. "We're hoping you might make it a little less weird, corporal. What have you got?"

Lenny consulted a raft of scribbled notes. "Let's start with the apple core," he said. "You did the right thing, bringing it in. It was laced with enough poison to kill a water buffalo."

"What kind of poison?"

"It's a poison that has been withdrawn from commercial use in many states, lieutenant, including this one, mainly because it's just too dangerous. There is no known antidote, you see. You'd probably recognize it as 10-80, used by ranchers for killing off marauding coyotes, and by farmers to control infestations of mice, pocketgophers and whistlers, as well as sundry other rodents. The environmentalists raised merry hell about it though, and it was eventually taken off the market."

"Whistlers?"

"A whistler, Mark, is a large marmot, closely related to the common woodchuck. It makes a trilling sound, like a street-corner 'wolf' whistle."

"That is most interesting, corporal, to say the least." The lieutenant was jotting something in her own notebook. "Anything else?"

"Could be, lieutenant. We found traces of three separate foreign substances on the face of the cross, two of which we haven't yet analyzed, but the third is definitely a type of chemical fungicide: one of the dithiocarbamates. We haven't been able to isolate the precise one exactly (there must be dozens), but maybe that, in itself, will be helpful to you."

"I'm sure it will, corporal. At the moment, however, it doesn't

appear to do much to narrow our list of suspects. Ouchi and Phinney, for instance, could both have legitimate access to fungicides and rodent poisons, in their joint care and responsibility for the acreage on which the church and the rectory is situated. And, Stirling, with his peach orchard, would even probably have a supply on hand."

"But 10-80 isn't available anymore, lieutenant, and hasn't been for years."

"There could still be plenty of it hanging around, corporal, in garages, storage sheds —"

"Yeah, I guess."

"But how does Goodman fit in?" Mark asked.

"If he wanted the stuff bad enough, he could always steal it," the lieutenant said impatiently, then, "But *wa-a-a-it* a minute! Hmmm —" She tilted her beautiful head in an attitude of deep cogitation. "Something has come to mind."

"Everybody duck," Mark muttered. "Here comes the punch line."

"Not yet, Mark, but I have a nagging hunch that might just wrap up this entire fiasco." The lieutenant turned to Lenny Brewster. "Have you alerted the M.E. about the 10-80?"

"Yes, about an hour ago. He'll be looking for it when he does the autopsy."

"Good. Now, Mark. I want you to round up all our suspects: Ouchi, Phinney, Stirling and Goodman, their respective wives, and, of course, Elizabeth. I want them all at the church within the hour. But before you leave the Precinct, put in a call to Sam Morton and see if he'll give you confirmation that LeMay was, *in fact*, poisoned with 10-80."

"Sure, lieutenant, but where're you going?"

"To St. Cuthbert's, just as you are, but I'll have to meet you there. There's a stop I've got to make on the way." She gave him one of those vague looks that, he knew from past experience, signaled the beginning of the end. "Hypotheses, Mark, like alibis and arson, have to be substantiated before they become fact. And *facts* are what we need to nail the man who crucified LeMay." She turned and headed for the door. "See you in church."

Mark watched her go with a shrug and a long-suffering sigh. "Yeah," he said, almost wistfully, "see you in church."

THEY WERE IN THE CHURCH WAITING, ALL EIGHT OF THEM, when the lieutenant entered unexpectedly from the rear vestibule. Everyone but the reverend and his comely young daughter was seated in the front, right-hand pew. The Goodmans near the center aisle; Yosh Ouchi and his subservient spouse, dead center; and the sun-

scorched Stirlings hugged the end of the pew, on the outer aisle against the wall. Elizabeth sat behind them, in the second pew, midway between the Ouchis and the Stirlings. The Reverend Phinney, draped in his customary black cassock, had assumed a somewhat theatrical, unmoving, prayerful pose, just inside the communion rail. And Mark, who had stationed himself at the main entrance, moved up now behind the group as the lieutenant swept down the aisle to mount the dais. She had a coil of heavy rope looped over one shoulder.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," the lieutenant said to the motley gathering, "but having now arrived, I can assure you I will not detain you long. The exception to that, of course, will be the one culprit among you who so ignominiously dispatched your fellow parishioner, Kevin LeMay."

"Are you suggesting that the killer is someone in this room, lieutenant?" the punctilious parson exclaimed with a show of exaggerated horror.

"Indeed, I am," the lieutenant was quick to respond, "and I might also suggest that you follow the example of the other seven suspects in this case, and avail yourself of a pew. For the duration of this inquiry, sir, I will hold the floor."

"Uh, yes — yes, of course, lieutenant." The reverend was visibly nonplussed, but he managed to maneuver the lieutenant into a private huddle facing away from the other participants. "Lieutenant," he whispered against his palm, "that notebook you found in LeMay's apartment, do you think it could be, well — placed in my custody — ?"

"That notebook, sir, is evidence."

"Yes, of course, but — "

"But, nothing." The lieutenant shrugged the man's hand from her shoulder. "If you are curious to know if it contains the name of your daughter, it does. And will it be made public? No. Now, if you'll kindly park yourself in a pew, as I have already suggested, I'll endeavor to shed some light on the macabre death of Kevin LeMay."

When the reverend had reluctantly ensconced himself in the second pew, behind the Goodmans, the lieutenant stood stolidly, front and center on the dais. She surveyed her borrowed congregation with a look of saddened deprecation that bordered on outright pity. "What a pathetic bunch of bumbler," her eyes seemed to say, "there's not a mother's blush of you who isn't guilty of some dark deed."

"I was at a loss, at first," the lieutenant said aloud, "as to how anyone could lift LeMay's body (he was dead before he was crucified) up on that cross, and then proceed to nail him there. One answer could have been Stirling's 'giraffe,' as he calls it, or even Goodman's truck-

mounted sign erector. But both of these contrivances would have left vehicle tracks on the lawn, and there were no such tracks visible the morning he was found, as we all noted at the time; except, of course, for those of the firetruck. That left only the unlikely use of a ladder with which to accomplish the task, and who among you would have the physical prowess to so prevail?"

The lieutenant swept the sorry-looking group with her eyes. They, in turn, looked wonderingly at one another.

"Tonight, however," the lieutenant continued, "I unearthed this coil of rope." She held it up for all to see. "It was adroitly hidden under the workbench in Mr. Ouchi's equipment garage, where it had been overlooked, or thought to be irrelevant, perhaps, by those who had searched the premises — "

"Not hidden," Ouchi countered angrily, "the lope is arways kept there."

"That may be so, Mr. Ouchi, but it *was* used to hoist Mr. LeMay up on that cross. And it is my assertion, that whoever crucified him, also killed him. The rope was looped around the dead man's chest, under his arms, then over the top rung of the ladder, and in this manner, lifted to the desired height. Then, by simply climbing the ladder, unencumbered, the murderer was able to perform his grisly task at will. The shiny top rung of the ladder, burnished by the action of the rope, I am certain, under laboratory examination, will further attest to this — not to mention a microscopic scrutiny of the rope itself."

"You mean that by lab testing the rope and the ladder, you'll be able to identify the murderer?" The reverend's voice carried a note of genuine awe.

"I already know the identity of the murderer," the lieutenant replied; "the lab will merely give us the forensic proof we need to prosecute — "

The lieutenant suddenly straightened. "Damn!" she exclaimed. Her eyes spun around the inside of the church. "Where are the Stirlings? Did anyone see them leave?" The pew near the outer aisle was now empty.

"They went out that side door, lieutenant." A wide-eyed Elizabeth pointed to a curtained portal, close to where the Stirlings had been sitting. "I—I thought you saw them — "

"Where does that door lead, Phinney?"

The reverend was about to reply when the sound of a bell echoed hollowly through the cavernous interior of the church.

"The bell tower," the reverend gasped. "They're up in the bell tower!"

THE LIEUTENANT WAS ALREADY AT THE DOOR, TUGGING THE drape aside. Mark was close at her heels. A steep, circular staircase rose up in front of them and, together, they took the stairs two at a time.

The bell sounded again. It came from directly above them, where daylight from the open spire illuminated their ascent. And as the lieutenant cleared the last three steps in one frantic leap, she caught sight of Stirling, standing on the outer ledge, looking apprehensively toward the ground a hundred feet below. He was clutching his cringing wife against himself in a grip fed by fear and frenzy.

The lieutenant's shoulder brushed the huge bell, and it tolled softly as both Stirlings turned their stricken eyes toward her.

"Get back!" Stirling growled, "or I'll jump and take her with me." He held the terrified woman firmly in his grasp, his eyes wide and wild.

The lieutenant had stopped dead at the top of the stairs, but now began to drift, almost imperceptibly, around the near side of the bell. Mark was already moving, unseen, around the other side.

"Jumping won't solve anything," the lieutenant said gently. "It's not the end of the world, you know. And your wife is innocent — "

"She's 'bout as innocent as a two-bit whore," Stirling said with an ugly laugh. He shook the woman fiercely, his eyes irate and filled with loathing.

"Let's talk it out," the lieutenant coaxed in a soft voice, "you can still jump, if that's what you want, after we've — "

A loud bellow came from the top of the stairs as a distraught Reverend Phinney emerged in a violent rush. "Don't jump!" he screamed. "My God, don't let him jump — !"

Panic suddenly flared in Stirling's face, and with one fist clamped firmly on his wife's wrist, he shoved himself away from the ledge. The lieutenant streaked forward, but Mark, who was closer, caught the woman's other wrist and braced himself against the wooden parapet. The sudden jerk of their two falling bodies against Mark's vice-like hold, loosened Stirling's fingers and with a gurgling cry, he plummeted toward the earth.

Monica Stirling had fainted dead-away when they hauled her back into the bell tower.

THE SUN WAS LOW IN THE AFTERNOON SKY WHEN THE lieutenant stood watching the coroner's black van cart away the body of Nigel Stirling. The vehicle's tires left deep indentations in the close-clipped lawn.

"So it was Stirling," Mark said as he came up beside her, "who gave LeMay the apple laced with 10-80."

"No, Mark, it was actually Monica Stirling. She confessed to her part in it while you were scraping her late husband off the lawn. But she did it under a threat of violence to herself. I don't imagine her involvement will go much beyond a Court Of Inquiry."

"But how did you know it was Stirling, lieutenant?" It was the voice of the reverend who had just joined them in front of the huge wooden cross.

"It was really quite simple," the lieutenant replied. "The lab crew found traces of dithiocarbamate on the cross, a chemical used in the manufacture of certain fungicides. With information gleaned from my own orcharding background (which I reinforced with a visit to the office of the local Department Of Horticulture, on my way out here), I was able to associate the chemical with fungicides produced primarily for the irradiation of Leaf Curl, in the growing of peaches: Ferbam, Zeram, Maneb, to name only a few. And peaches, of course, were Stirling's major crop."

"Hmmpf!" the reverend grunted. "I would have thought the Biblical reference that was stuck to the cross would have had even greater significance."

The lieutenant turned to him patiently. "Goodman took the agony of his wife's infidelity out on *her*, personally. Ouchi dealt with *his* little deceiver by tightening her psychological leash. Stirling, however, just couldn't handle it. He was the only one who turned his initial anger almost totally toward LeMay, as the scrawled Bible message clearly intimated." The lieutenant sighed reflectively. "The answer to who killed LeMay, had to be hidden in the identity of the mental cripple who perpetrated the mock crucifixion. Find one; and you find the other. And there lay the tragedy — "

"The tragedy," the reverend moaned, "was that it had to happen here." He moved off disconsolately toward the church. "Oh, what a travesty," he lamented, "St. Cuthbert's will never be the same."

The lieutenant laughed as she watched the churchman walk away, then, turning to Mark, she said, "Know something? We haven't even had lunch yet."

"Don't I know it," Mark groaned. "My stomach's been growling like a junkyard dog."

"Come on, then." She took his hand and led him toward the unmarked Chevy where Mark had parked it at the curb. "I know a terrific little Italian restaurant over on the East Side. And this time, I'll even buy."

"Lieutenant," Mark said with a sheepish grin as he tagged along, "what do you think the guys in Homicide would say, if they saw us holding hands?"

Cathy Carruthers chuckled and tightened her fingers on his. "Something male and macho, I guess, like, *What's up, Jock?*" ●



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His brain had hemorrhaged in a dozen places. Surgeons had removed microscopic slivers of glass from his left eyeball, but they couldn't save the eye. Beneath the gauze and bandages was just an empty socket. The worst thing about it all, Cavanaugh realized, was that the punks who'd done this to him were likely to get away with it!

Blind Justice

by JERRY JACOBSON

WHEN THE MUSIC BLARED UP AGAIN UNDER CAVANAUGH'S feet, its vibrations shook the walls and floor with the intensity of a 4.5 Richter Scale earthquake. The salt and pepper shakers on the cheap, porcelain-top table in his kitchen had actually begun to move off their spots and the apartment's livingroom window started to shimmy and shake like it was a foot-thick slab of jello. The kid was a night baker's assistant and his stereo had four-foot-high quadraphonic speakers, one in each corner of the room and when he'd learned Cavanaugh hated rock and roll with an unbridled passion, turning the damn thing on and up to full-blast was the first thing he did at nine a.m. every morning when he got home from work.

And the kid wasn't the least afraid of him, either, because he knew Cavanaugh was a 58-year-old former shipyard worker with steel rods down his leg and back, just a welfare case who drank cheap port wine to soften the pain of the rods rubbing against bone and who wouldn't put up much of a battle if things ever came to that. The kid's name was Raoul Cribbs and he parked his Harley-Davidson in his first-floor apartment and had a new tattoo carved into him once a week and was about as bad as bad came.

The music rose in volume and seemed to grow like some ugly animal whose cells had gone berserk, making it double its size every minute. Cavanaugh went into the bathroom and wolfed down a handful of aspirin, but the pains continued shooting up the rod in his leg as though it were catching lightning. No one on the first floor ever complained about the music because the Cribbs kid lived next to the laundry room on one side and nearly-deaf Elvira Peachtree on the other, so the ear-splitting sounds traveled straight up like rockets. And Cribbs had made it clear to Cavanaugh that if *he* ever complained — especially to the cops — Cribbs would simply kill him, calmly do away with him the way welfare cripples deserved.

Cavanaugh went into the tiny bedroom and fell onto the bed. A little out of the direct, upward blast of the music, its din subsided a little, but not enough to give him any peace. Here in the Belltown district, no one had peace. They were the brethren of the damned: the destitute, the infirmed, the jobless, the hopeless, the unbalanced, the mad. Merchant seamen walked the same cold streets with hookers and bums and rapists, with card-sharks and welfare workers and car thieves. And punk night bakers.

Cavanaugh could hear laughter below him, high-pitched female laughter. Sometimes they brought home girls, Cribbs and his roommate, a moody, heavyset kid named Captain Crunch, who was the night bartender at the Seven Seas Tavern and who boasted he could crush anything — *anything* — with just his bare hands.

When they didn't bring home girls, they brought home women, the kind that if you engaged them in conversation for any length of time, it cost you forty bucks. Up with the music now floated the sweet stench of marijuana as it seeped through the paper-thin walls of the Deluxe Apartments. They were having a party. Cribbs and Captain Crunch had parties every day and every night. On the day the sun died and the earth began to shrivel up and grow cold, they would still be having a party, listening to Led Zeppelin and smoking dope and making love and revving the Harley even as they died.

Cavanaugh's head felt like someone had opened it up with a tire iron. The spasms in his leg were coming in an unbearable string, in endless waves of black pain. They were, he knew, doing it partly for their own enjoyment and partly to drive Cavanaugh insane. They knew he was up there, a helpless object of pity and scorn, a little nobody they could irritate and bedevil at will and without fear of reprisals.

HE LET THE MUSIC DRIVE HIM TO THE BRINK OF MENTAL breakdown and then hoisted himself from the bed. He went back into

the livingroom, picked up the telephone receiver and punched out 911. When an operator came on the line, Cavanaugh said, "I'd like to report a disturbance at 346 Dockerty Street, at the Deluxe Apartments."

The female operator remained cool. "What sort of disturbance, sir?"

"A party," said Cavanaugh. "Girls, pot, quad stereo speakers turned up full blast."

"Where is the noise coming from, sir?"

"Apartment 106. I'm in 206, just above."

"And your name, sir?"

"Cavanaugh. Henry Cavanaugh."

"Is that Belltown, sir?"

"Belltown, yes."

"Have you spoken to the manager about the noise, sir?"

"Well, not yet, no. Not this time. Before, yes. On all the other occasions, of course. But Mr. Delgado — he's the manager — Mr. Delgado is scared out of his skull by these guys. He's old and he's frail and these guys are young and big and bad."

The operator listened to him patiently and then said, "All right, Mr. Cavanaugh, we'll send a patrol car around. Please inform the manager of the disturbance and that you've called the police and then wait outside in front of the building for the patrol unit."

Finally, some action. Cavanaugh was through being intimidated and pushed around and baited. He was plain through.

HE LEFT HIS APARTMENT AND WENT DOWNSTAIRS. HIS LEG was on fire. He could even hear the steel rod grating and grinding into bone as it manufactured fine calcium with the ease of a bench sander making sawdust. He limped past Unit-106 and through a blast of music which felt like a force field somewhere out in space and down to the end of the hallway. He knocked on Mr. Delgado's door, then rang the bell and then heard a string of expletives in Spanish. The door opened the width of the chain-guard and Cavanaugh saw a fat, black moustache, flaring nostrils and eyes the color of molten lava.

"Ah, Señor Cavanaugh. The indignant tenant. You don't like the Gringo rock and roll again? You want me to march down there and kick el mucho butts, Mr. Cavanaugh? Is that what you want? Fights in my building? Blood on the carpets? Me, dead in the hallway? Go back to your apartment, Mr. Cavanaugh, wait for your welfare check and mind your own business."

"I've called the police," Cavanaugh told Delgado.

The eyes grew wider still. "Cops? You called cops to the Deluxe? Why don't you drag a dead body up and down the stoop? Put a sign out says we got illegals, hookers and dope at reasonable prices? Jesus."

"They'll be here in five minutes."

"Then, *you* deal with them, Cavanaugh. Me, I don't see or hear nothin' and I got the teevee turned up on *General Hospital* and all the shades pulled down."

The door slammed with hard finality, as Delgado sealed himself off from trouble, the way everyone in Belltown did, keeping to their own safe pockets of existence. Well, Cavanaugh had done as the operator had instructed. And if the police kept to their end of the bargain, Raoul Cribbs would at last go down in their books as a subject in a disturbance complaint. In Belltown there were only minor victories.

Cavanaugh made his way back down the hallway, fully intending to wait out in front of the Deluxe for the arrival of the patrol car. But when he got to 106, he felt suddenly seized by a sense of obligation. He felt Raoul Cribbs ought to at least know the police were on their way. Maybe the knowledge would strike him with a surge of contrition. Most people usually began to feel a need for atonement when cops were breathing down their necks. He rang the bell and a strange energy ran through him, a prickly feeling which seemed to be saying he'd made an awful mistake.

NOBODY INSIDE THE APARTMENT WAS PAYING THE LEAST BIT attention to the bell. Either that, or its thin sound could not penetrate the wall of blaring music. Cavanaugh depressed it again and this time held it in. A male voice inside swore a streak of profanity. The energy of danger stirred inside Cavanaugh again.

It was Raoul who tore open the door. He was shirtless. A dark, blue eagle was spread across his chest and beneath it a banner that read *I kick ass and take names*. Cavanaugh looked past his bulk. A nude girl was sprawled in a bean-bag chair. Captain Crunch was leaning against the doorway to the kitchen, sipping from a bottle of beer, while someone out of Cavanaugh's view was rattling ice cubes and giggling.

Raoul bared both rows of teeth. "Cavanaugh, isn't it? Our resident welfare busybody? Sure it is. What do you want, loser? A cup of sugar? Some knitting needles? A backbone?"

The fear was still crawling inside him, but Cavanaugh kept his eyes fixed on the bearded face. "The police are coming by about you. I've just phoned in a disturbance complaint.

Dirty fingers scratched near the eagle's left wing. "Disturbance? You're not disturbing us, Cavanaugh. You get on our nerves, but you don't disturb us."

The nude girl was now sitting astride Raoul's motorcycle which was parked just inside a set of sliding glass doors leading out to the street. She began making roaring sounds deep in her throat. "It's so big and bad, Raoul, just like you."

Suddenly Raoul was grabbing Cavanaugh at the back of his neck. "You want to make some new friends, Cavanaugh? Of course you do. Everybody should try to make at least one new friend every day."

A second girl came from the kitchen, wearing only a Who tee-shirt, and draped a pale arm around Captain Crunch's shoulder. "Oh, guests," she cooed. "Groovy. Maybe I should decant the wine and get the goose liver pate out of the fridge."

Raoul had dragged Cavanaugh all the way into the livingroom. "Ain't no guest," said Captain Crunch, who shrugged the girl's arm from his shoulder roughly. "This guy's breaking and entering. I mean, anybody can see he's got a stranglehold on Raoul's hands with his neck. Hell, this guy's tryin' a damn strong-arm daylight burglary!"

Suddenly, Captain Crunch was lunging wildly across the room. Cavanaugh felt Raoul's choke hold release. A shadow darkened Cavanaugh's left eye. It was rust-colored and it was in ferocious motion. It flew into his eye with tremendous force. Cavanaugh heard bones crack and then a wild river of blood was rushing down his face. The room began to spin and to invert. Laughter was echoing loudly in his ears as though a crowd of people were jeering at him from the back of a darkened cave, the laughs falling all over each other like humans in panic as they tried to flee a burning building. A brilliant blinding white light exploded in his brain and then Cavanaugh had the helpless, woozy feeling of someone falling from a tall structure, floating and tumbling in a hideous freefall through silent space. And then everything went black.

MUCH LATER, THE DOCTORS TOLD CAVANAUGH HE LAY NEAR death for ten days. His brain had hemorrhaged in a dozen places and they weren't even telling him how many boreholes they'd made in his skull to stop the bleeding and remove blood clots. Three surgeons had teamed up to remove the microscopic slivers of glass imbedded in his left eyeball, followed by the network of fine sutures in an attempt to save it. They had saved his life, but not the eye. Beneath the gauze and

bandages was now just an empty socket.

But he had suffered no brain damage and on the morning of his eleventh day they moved him from the Intensive Care Unit into a semi-private room with three other convalescing patients. As he lay there, Cavanaugh tried to clear and order his mind so that he could concentrate on the hazy events of nearly two weeks before, in case the police sent someone around to take his statement in what had now become an incident of assault with a deadly weapon.

His brain was also occupied with the dark thought of what his hospital bill would look like and how he would ever pay for it. He no longer had a pension check for the intermittent years he had worked as a shipyard worker. Five years before, the administrator of the pension fund had departed in an abrupt manner, in the company of a female secretary named Winona Drake, neither of whom had been seen or heard from since. They had also bankrupted the pension fund to the tune of \$280,000. Cavanaugh, along with three hundred other former employees of Kraft Shipyards had begun a class action suit against the fund administrator and his traveling secretary. Kraft Shipyards also wanted its matching fund contributions returned and Cavanaugh's union wanted criminal prosecution. But now, five years after the fact, nearly all parties had become resigned to the fact that the absconders had now vanished successfully into the woodwork, had changed their names and identities and were likely living in some pencil-dot foreign country in complete anonymity. Ironically, it was now Cavanaugh himself who would probably be sued for the payment of a medical debt. The world truly did turn in wondrous, mysterious ways.

IT WAS MID-MORNING WHEN THE POLICE DETECTIVE WAS ushered by a nurse into Cavanaugh's curtained cubicle. He was bear-like, but with a soft, comforting smile. Cavanaugh had trouble reading the detective's name on the identity card and sensing his difficulty, the detective quickly replaced the card in his left breast pocket and introduced himself as Detective Third Grade Otis Marchbank.

He began by explaining to Cavanaugh that as yet, they had no one in custody in the matter of his assault because the police had been unable to locate any witnesses. Only Cavanaugh himself could be of any help to them and Cavanaugh had been comatose for four days and in and out of surgery the rest of the time. The detective then asked whether Cavanaugh wished to lodge a formal complaint. With his lips set

rigidly, Cavanaugh nodded that he did.

"Then let's begin with the incident itself, Mr. Cavanaugh," Marchbank said. "Concentrate and take your time. A thorough report can sometimes spell the difference between a successfully prosecuted case and one thrown out of court for a lack of witnesses or evidence."

Very carefully, Henry Cavanaugh recounted the events leading up to his assault, beginning with his call to the 911 operator and culminating with Captain Crunch's vicious and unwarranted attack in the room in the Deluxe Apartments. When he finished, he lit a cigarette from a pack on a sidetable and tried to think whether he'd left out anything of importance. He didn't think so.

The detective was flipping back several pages in his small notebook. Softly, he cleared his throat. "On the day of the incident, the patrol unit responding to your disturbance complaint encountered a delayed response time due to a grocery store hold-up in their sector. The robbery scene was only a half-dozen blocks from the Deluxe Apartments, as a matter of fact, but that call took precedence over yours. As a result, they were delayed much longer than we like. They found you unconscious in a first floor unit of the building, called for an aid-car and a detective from Robbery-Assault Division. You underwent emergency surgery here at Sisters of Mercy Hospital at 10:51 a.m., six minutes after your admittance at the Emergency Room."

By Cavanaugh's reckoning, that meant he had lain on the floor of that apartment for nearly an hour without treatment, his head leaking blood through countless vessels. He was lucky to be alive.

The detective asked Cavanaugh for one of his cigarettes and Cavanaugh nodded. Marchbank lit it and flipped to a new page in his notebook. "The manager of the Deluxe — a Mr. Delgado — was no help to us at all. He said you complained about the noise that morning, but since you'd called the police first, he decided to let them handle the matter. I asked if he was willing to testify in court that there *had been* a disturbance. He declined to do so, saying that he had been watching television with the volume turned up and hadn't heard a thing."

"Good old see-no, hear-no Delgado," Cavanaugh said. "If he was a prisoner in a Nazi death-camp, he'd probably testify he thought all the Germans were doing was baking bread."

"We don't even have the name of the man who assaulted you. When the patrol unit arrived, there was no one in the apartment unit. They found all the closets bare and a set of patio doors wide open. We know the name of the renter of Apartment 106 to be one Raoul Cribbs. Was he the man who assaulted you?"

"No, it was his roommate. I only know him as Captain Crunch."

"Only Cribbs' name appears on the mailbox in the lobby," said the detective. "I'll go back to the Deluxe. Maybe I'll get lucky and find a piece of opened mail with his name on it. His *real* name. Nobody but a resident of the Padded Wall Kingdom would have his mail addressed to Captain Crunch. Now then, Mr. Cavanaugh. You say there were four people in the unit when you were pulled inside by Cribbs."

"Captain Crunch, Cribbs, and two women," Cavanaugh told the detective. "I never saw the women before."

"Okay. Next piece of business. We found an oil spot on the carpet just inside the glass doors."

"From Cribbs' motorcycle. A Harley. He always kept it inside the apartment."

"Do you recall if Captain Crunch had a vehicle?" asked Marchbank.

"Yes, a dingy gray van. Ten years old at least. Every inch had a dent in it."

"Well, they packed up and left in a hurry. Clothing, canned goods, toilet articles. They left the refrigerator filled with perishables, so they don't intend coming back real soon."

Cavanaugh asked about the beer bottle, the one Captain Crunch had been holding above his head when he'd charged at him in a frenzy.

"We got a bad break there," the detective told him. "Lots of glass on the rug where you fell and it was a longnecked bottle. When a bottle that shape is wielded as a weapon, the neck of it breaks off clearly in the attacker's hand."

"Fingerprints," Cavanaugh anticipated.

"That's where our bad break comes in. We found more glass out on the patio. Someone had dashed it against a low, concrete wall. The shards match the glass found inside. Scattered any fingerprints seven ways from Sunday."

"Then we have no evidence that an assault even took place," said Cavanaugh in a dismal tone.

"If you get a jury trial, twelve reasonably intelligent people will be able to put two-and-two together and conclude that an assault took place. Establishing who *did* that assault beyond a reasonable doubt might be another matter entirely. But let's wait until all the chickens hatch, Mr. Cavanaugh."

The detective paused to bring a document out of his inside pocket. It was the assault complaint, he told Cavanaugh, who took the ballpoint pen extended to him and guessed the approximate location of a dotted line.

"We have more than enough to get an arrest warrant," Marchbank told him. "The only thing standing in our way now is an official identification of the assailant and we're ready to go. Seems everyone else at the Deluxe knows him only as Captain Crunch, too."

"He was a night bartender at Seven Seas Tavern," offered Cavanaugh. "I think it's on Prefontaine Street, down in The Square."

"Didn't know that," said Marchbank, jotting the name down. "Mr. Cavanaugh, you've just provided me with a very valuable short-cut."

The detective rose from his chair, put his notebook away, and patted Cavanaugh's hand. "No more for the time being," he said. "You get some rest now and I'll try and get us a suspect. If I need anymore, I'll be back. Take care of yourself."

Cavanaugh's disposition began to brighten. At long last, Cavanaugh could glimpse a hint of justice poking its head up above the horizon. What he could not see were the dark clouds building behind it.

THAT NIGHT HE WOKE UP SCREAMING IN PAIN. HIS HEAD felt like a beachball overloaded with air and brought to just one breath less than its bursting-point. Blood vessels in his brain had begun to explode, one after another, like a string of fire crackers. He was rushed back into surgery and a priest was summoned from the hospital's chapel. He looked down at Cavanaugh on the operating table, his peacefully tragic smile the final thing Cavanaugh saw before he went under. He was dead and he knew it. The surgical team was going to give it the old college try, but they were undergoing nothing more than ritual.

He spent ninety hours more in a state of unconsciousness before he would learn the resources and resolve of his surgical team had once again beat back death. But he would no longer have the function of his left arm, and his left leg would be only partially mobile. If their rehabilitation on his leg was successful, he would walk with a slight limp. If not, Cavanaugh would have to drag it along with him as something like dead-weight for the rest of his days.

This time his convalescence was slow and torturous. Twice daily he took arduous therapy to restore as much use as possible to his lame leg. His nurse was a heavyset, no-nonsense deviltress named Letti. She said she was three-fifths Norwegian and two-fifths sadist and told Cavanaugh they would get along well if he did as he was told and opened his mouth only to gulp a fresh breath or to cry out in pain.

By the end of the first week, she had Cavanaugh angry enough to want to kill her. Three days after that, he took his first unaided step on

his previously deadened leg and hugged her as he collapsed in her beefy arms in tears and gratitude. He would walk supported by a cane for the remainder of his life, but he would walk.

Not surprisingly, he was transferred to a new bed in a different semi-private room (since it was generally agreed on the ward that he would not survive this bout of surgery, his other bed had been stripped and his personal belongings collected). He asked if a police detective named Marchbank had been asking to see him, but no one seemed to know. That news didn't distress him greatly. He still wasn't in any kind of shape to go through another interview and likely Marchbank had a deskful of other cases to work off and would get back to Cavanaugh in time, or when he had some positive news to give him. He did ask one of the doctors how much a plastic eyes would cost. The lowest estimate the physician could come up with was \$600, not counting the charge for its implantation. On the other hand, a simple black eye-patch cost under forty dollars and would lend his appearance a mysterious, continental look. And that was closer to his price-range.

The next few days were recuperative and languid. He waited for the explosions to erupt again in his brain, but his head was peaceful and his mind was clearer than it had been in weeks. He gained weight and he was ambulatory around the ward if he kept to his crutches. He waited for a tingling sensation in the fingers of his left hand to signal that his hand and arm were waking; but that was a prayer to unreasonable to be granted, he knew. And he was right. But he had a clear concept of time and its passage now; and he was sleeping his nights without torment or nightmare or pain. And he was still from Belltown, which meant that even as an absentee, Cavanaugh had no right to expect any of the Big Dreams to be answered.

IT WAS MID-MORNING ON A SUNNY THURSDAY WHEN A vaguely familiar face poked itself in the door to Cavanaugh's room. To be sure, the face was smiling. But Cavanaugh was struck that it was not altogether a smile that was completely genuine.

"Heard you had another bout with the knife, so I put a visit to you at the top of my list."

Marchbank himself looked pale and sickly. Cavanaugh asked if he'd been ill.

"The flu," said the detective. "It hit me last week. Like a load of bricks. They had to put another detective on my cases and he dropped the ball a couple of times."

Cavanaugh wanted some explanation of the use of that term.

"We found your assailant, Mr. Cavanaugh. The one called Captain

Crunch. We found a mailing envelope addressed to him at the Deluxe. His name is Tony Baltzer, Anthony Ball and Antonio Baltz, depending upon whim and which identification he happens to be carrying in his wallet at the time. Several arrests for assault, a couple for creating a public disturbance — not counting the one in which you were involved — and several complaints which never materialized into formal charges. A hothead, a man with a very short fuse. That sums up his personality in a nutshell, I think, if you'll excuse the lame pun."

"Then he's in jail now," said Cavanaugh.

"As I say, I was flat on my back with the flu," came the thin, apologetic voice of a man whose eyes were now having some difficulty meeting Cavanaugh's. "You see, Baltzer was seen on the street in another part of the city after the warrant for his arrest was issued. A patrol officer in a cruiser recognized him as a wanted assault suspect and trailed him to an apartment house. After confirming the warrant and making the suspect, the officer made his arrest. The suspect was taken downtown, booked, fingerprinted and photographed and was formally charged with first-degree assault. He was unable to make bail at his arraignment and so the judge set a trial date and he was returned to his cell."

All neat and orderly, all by the book, all without pain or strain. Then why wasn't Marchbank smiling?

"Here is where the tapioca begins to hit the fan," continued Marchbank. "Baltzer got a speedy trial date. I mean *speedy* speedy. Speed-of-light speedy. Who can figure the courts system? Just when it's bogged down like the Hudson River during a garbage drivers' strike, someone slips through the cracks and goes to court like he's shot out of a cannon.

"Four days after his arraignment, a city judge signed a subpoena ordering you to appear in court to give testimony as the complainant. A representative of warrants clerk slipped the subpoena under your door at the Deluxe."

"But I wasn't there," said Cavanaugh. "I was here, having an eye taken out and signing forms that will have me in debt for the rest of my life."

"I know, I know. The server found no one home and slipped the mail under the door. I mean, how was I or anyone else to know the wheels of justice would begin to grind at full-speed-ahead? I fully expected to lick the flu in three days and return to find the case file still on my desk and untouched by human hands. It's a rotten break all the way around, Mr. Cavanaugh. Had the server delivered the subpoena to the building manager, he might have forwarded your mail to Sister of Mercy. Then

you could have notified the court that your condition wouldn't have allowed you to appear, and there would have been a postponement."

"But none of that happened," said Cavanaugh dismally."

"The deputy city prosecutor who was trying your case held it up for a few hours, thinking you would turn up at any moment. They called your apartment, even searched the Criminal Courts Building. He had no way of knowing you were clinging to your life by a thread in a hospital room, no way of knowing where you were *at all*. He's very embarrassed about the entire incident and he sympathizes with you completely."

"And the trial?" asked Cavanaugh.

"In the absence of the complaining witness — the *only* witness, when you keep in mind Raoul Cribbs and the two young women were never located — without a witness to the assault, the court had to dismiss the charge and release Tony Baltzer from custody."

What was he saying? That the man who had brutally taken half Cavanaugh's eyesight was now walking the streets a free man? That he was free to crash more bottles into people's faces and eyes?

"I know the clerk's server should have done a more thorough job of tracking you down," the detective was eulogizing in a sad, commiserate tone, "but you must remember, the courts in this city handle 20,000 cases a year and the subpoena system still operates from the Dark Ages. They just don't have the manpower and resources to personally serve every subpoena. Unfortunately, they get only one whack at a case and if somebody blows it, the case is lost forever and can't even be refiled."

Cavanaugh could not believe all that he was hearing. His entire body began to convulse with indignation and rage, as though his ability to hold his temper and remain calm had suddenly short-circuited. "But a *crime* has been committed here!" he screamed at the detective. "I have been physically assaulted and I've lost an eye! I have been permanently *blinded!* And I have been crippled besides! I have been irreparably injured as a direct result of a criminal act!"

"I know how you feel, Mr. Cavanaugh," said Otis Marchbank quietly, trying to be a calmative influence. "But you see, no crime was proved in court and so the law must recognize and admit that no crime was committed."

"No crime was *committed?* Look at me! Just take a long, slow *look* at me! I am blind and one of my arms is useless and one of my legs is nothing but excess baggage! Dammit, a *crime has been committed!* And you're looking at the evidence of it right before your eyes!"

"Mr. Cavanaugh, please. I've talked to everyone, and nothing can

be done. Occasionally, justice just isn't served and we have to accept our losses gracefully. I know that's hard for you to understand and take, but the theory of justice is a fallible theory, nonetheless."

He was ranting like a lunatic now. He knew he was raving and yet he was powerless to stop it. "Justice is fallible and sometimes unserved? I'll tell you what justice is! Justice is blind! Hell, that's why her statue has that blindfold wrapped around her eyes out in front of the building! Because she's stone-cold blind! Just like me, Marchbank! Just like me! The unvictim of a crime that never happened!"

They finally had to bring attendants to apply a series of restraint straps to keep Cavanaugh immobile. Then they sedated him heavily. And as the images of doctors and nurses and attendants began to fade, he saw them huddled in conference next to his bed, very likely considering whether he should be transferred to the psychiatric ward.

THE DUSTY VAN HAD BEEN ON THE ROAD NOW FOR ALMOST seven hours. Tony had been behind the wheel through Oregon and they'd stopped at a redneck little tavern just outside Crescent City for three cases of beer they could use as chasers for some decent chemicals they'd picked up in Portland. Now, Raoul Cribbs was driving, while Tony Baltzer toked in the back on beer, amphetamines, grass and Led Zeppelin and Janis Joplin on the stereo.

"Should make Eureka by dusk," said Cribbs, turning his head slightly as he spoke so his words could penetrate the music and reach Baltzer's ears. "I know a dude there can score us some *good* weed, not any of this carpet pile we got now. And some window panes, top quality LSD. This guy knows a lab. Captain, those panes are guaranteed to put you on the dark side of Neptune, or you get your money back!"

Baltzer came forward to the van's cab to hand Cribbs a freshly rolled joint. "Got to hand it to you, Raoul, you got us out of that apartment and on the road faster than Spot goes squat."

"Had to," said Cribbs. "You got released because they couldn't find the old guy to testify against you. But when he gets out of that hospital, he's gonna come out mad. What's to stop him from buyin' a piece, lookin' us up and blowin' us clean away? *Nothing*'s to stop him. A half-blind man can still shoot a gun as good as a man who's got both his eyes."

"Eye for an eye, I can dig it," said Baltzer. "The law don't give him justice, so he wants his own revenge. An eye for an eye, a limb for a limb, a life for a life."

"And we got those broads dumped, too," said Cribbs, "so we're

free as birds. Never take broads on the road with you, Captain. They're nothin' but trouble. They want to stop at fancy restaurants all the time and they can't spell you at drivin' for spit and they can take half their damn *lives* in gas station johns. You can get broads anywhere. The process of natural selection, Captain, the process of natural selection!"

They were swallowed up in a stretch of towering redwoods, plunging them into sudden, almost total darkness. Raoul Cribbs reached forward and switched on the cab lights. "We gotta sell that hog back there first thing. A motor like that I can get five bills for. If we don't, we just hit a few mom-and-pops off the beaten path for till cash. Hell, we can do some hit-and-run robberies all the way down the coast and shoot out the back end millionaires!"

"Free as birds," repeated Baltzer. "Hey, you got Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Freebird* on any tapes back here? I think I wanna hear that song. Yes-sir, I think I wanna hear how I'm free as a goddam bird swoopin' down the highway, flyin' bad and low and gettin' meaner all the time!"

Raoul Cribbs did not have Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Freebird* on any of his tapes and they did not make Eureka by dusk, either. Between the towns of Trinidad and Clam Beach they pulled onto the gravel in front of a roadhouse tavern called Nikki Finn's. The lot was packed with cars and pick-ups and the glare of neon put Raoul Cribbs in a heady mood.

"It's Saturday night, Captain. Time to smoke some grass and kick some ass."

"Sounds like they got live music. Good band. Loud and bad."

Raoul put a baggie of grass down into his left boot and his cigarette papers in the right. "Kick 'em when they're up, kick 'em when they're down, and kick 'em just on general principles," he said.

Tony Baltzer let out a war whoop and locked the van. Somebody was going to get an eyeful tonight when Raoul really got high and opened his shirt and showed them that beautiful blue eagle on his chest. Yes sir, somebody damn sure was going to get an eyeful.

MICHAEL TESSERMAN DIDN'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THE TWO the minute they walked in the front door; the one called Raoul putting the make on every woman in the place and flashing that tattoo of an eagle on his chest and the other one who called himself Captain Crunch with the swagger that was a mile wide and the smirky grin on his face that said he could have any woman in the place in the sack in nothing flat just for the asking.

Captain Crunch had danced with Tesserman's girl twice. The first dance, Lisa had kept her distance from him, smiling politely, not encouraging any conversation. The second, she had allowed him to

hold her closer, laughing without restraint into his ear, letting him catch her up in the eroticism of the music.

When she got back to their table, Tesserman didn't speak to her for several minutes. He knew he had a bad temper, sometimes an uncontrollable one, which had got him in trouble with Lisa before, and with others as well. And so he did not speak to her until he was sure he could be civil and not blow his top.

"Two dances with that guy," he said finally, his voice subdued and untroubled. "You gonna make a career of him?"

Lisa was busy lighting a cigarette. A *normal* cigarette. Captain Crunch had told her while they were dancing that they had some good grass out in their van. He was an animal, she'd decided. He could dance until it made a girl almost feel she was in bed with him, and he had grass in his van. But he was still an animal and she felt the danger in him just by touching him.

Finally, she showed her boyfriend a pleasing smile. She knew Michael had a temper that made Attila the Hun look like a housecat, and she didn't want trouble. "Baby," she cooed, putting just enough tease in her tone to calm him down, "dancing is all sexual ritual, you know that. I'm just getting myself ready for you."

"I don't know *who* you're getting yourself ready for," said Tesserman.

The girl leaned toward him, to be furtive. They were alone at a rear table and the bar was miles away and there was so much noise in the place nobody could hear anyone *else* talk much less themselves; but drug-talk made *everyone* act furtive.

"Let's buy some grass from them," she said, lowly. "I mean, they've got a whole *van* filled with it out in the parking lot. Talk to him, Michael. Get us a lid and some papers. He's sitting down at the bar with that one called Raoul, and a lid can't cost all that much."

Tesserman hooded his eyes and stared her down. "I don't want to talk with him. I don't want to have anything to do with him. And if he saunters back here and asks you to dance with him again, I'm thinking seriously of taking him entirely apart and leave him on the floor for someone else to put back together again."

The girl stared back at him, her lips pruned in a sexy pout. With Michael, she knew all the right buttons to push. "Just a lid, baby. One little baggie."

"Forget it."

The pout grew deeper. She wasn't going to get anywhere with him this time, she knew. "There's no justice in the world, Michael. I mean, half the people *in here* are stoned out of their brains and *you* won't

even score us a baggie. There is simply *no justice.*"

"Relax," he told her. "Sometimes justice is blind, blind as a bat in broad daylight."

THEIR CONFRONTATION PASSED INTO HISTORY AND WAS forgotten. The band was very good, Michael decided. They'd been stuck for a five-dollar cover at the door when they came in, but Renegade Heat was a hot band and cheap at twice the price. If you listened closely to them, you could catch in them influences of Boston and Led Zeppelin and Bruce Springsteen's great E Street Band and they showed flashes of being as fine as pure silk and as raw as bloody meat. Tesserman flagged down a barmaid and got Lisa another wine flip and another bottle of beer for himself. He took only a small sip from the bottle when it arrived and then leaned back and allowed himself to be swept off on a tide of marijuana smoke and good, cooking music.

Michael Tesserman was not immediately aware that the one calling himself Captain Crunch was approaching their table from the lower level of the bar-area. The fine music had captured nearly all of his sensibilities and the standing crowd was thick and the man had to snake his way through it slowly. But then the mill and surge of bodies parted and Tesserman saw him, coming like a jungle cat, the leering grin on his lips and his hips swaying suggestively. Michael Tesserman took one, quick glance at Lisa and saw her eyes jump with excitement. There was no mistake in Tesserman's mind that he was coming to dance with her and that she would not refuse him. Lisa knew all the right buttons to push, knew all the side-streets and dark back alleys to Tesserman's passions. Perhaps she had been right when she said there was no justice in the world sometimes.

Well, maybe there was a little justice left. When the one calling himself Captain Crunch came out of the crowd and the thick smoke, grinning, the fingers of Michael Tesserman's right hand closed tightly around the neck of the nearly full beer bottle. He was leering directly at Lisa, not paying the least bit attention to Tesserman. That the man considered Tesserman as no threat enraged and maddened him.

And then his temper took him over completely, as though it were a being and a force completely separate of his own mind and body. Michael Tesserman rose from his chair in one vengeful motion, bringing the full bottle back behind him in a swift arc and then propelling it forward with as much force as his muscles would allow. A mist of beer filled the air and then Tesserman heard bone crack as he brought the bottle into the man's left eye and temple.

Blood began to spurt immediately, as though a faucet of it had been

turned on. The man grabbed the side of his head as he dropped to his knees, screaming out in excruciating pain. Michael Tesserman struck him again in that position, bringing the bottle downward in a diving arc. It disintegrated into a million pieces, leaving only its amber neck in Tesserman's hand. No justice? Hell, he'd show them justice, justice that was swift and true and final.

He watched mercilessly, as the one calling himself Captain Crunch fell forward on his face, screaming that he was blind, holding his left palm over his eye as a desperate pressure bandage, while the blood oozed out between his fingers and ran down his wrist and forearm.

Blind? Michael Tesserman fervently *prayed* he was blind. He would show Lisa what justice looked like.

Yessir. Blind justice.

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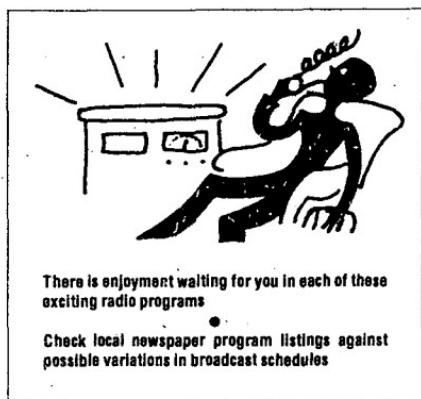
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Ferg Foley had little heart for the insurance job. The woman made it too easy for him. But the jewel robbery was another matter!

A Matter of Organization

by DICK STODGHILL

VINCE LEVANDOWSKI LINGERED ON THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT of the diner, poking halfheartedly at the remains of breakfast with a toothpick. The pale morning sunlight waged its daily battle with the haze off the lake and the smog from the factories. A light breeze from the park carried the fragrance of autumn to him. He inhaled deeply, savoring the aroma.

It was a day meant to be lazed away. The kind of day that Vince Levandowski most enjoyed because others were working and he was free. Mornings were always the best. The whole day lay before him to do with as he chose. In late afternoon when people left the shops and factories a vague discontentedness would come over him. Then, with their work behind them, the others seemed to have something he didn't have. He wasn't certain just what it was but he could feel it, knew it was there. Had anyone told him it was a sense of accomplishment he would have laughed at them.

But late afternoon was long way off. The armed robbery charge in East Liverpool had been dismissed and Vince Levandowski was at peace with the world. Now the only problem facing him was deciding whether to walk east or west on Euclid Avenue. He flipped the toothpick toward the curb and replaced it in his mouth with a cigarette. When it was lit he tossed the match after the toothpick and struck out west at a leisurely pace.

He eyed the shop windows without enthusiasm. Then, as he was passing Rivers Jewelry Store, a large ring attracted his attention. He paused to admire it but after several seconds decided the stone was too big to be the real thing. As he started to turn away he caught sight of a figure inside the store. Grinning, he opened the door and called out, "Hey, big businessman, how you doing?"

The young man behind the counter looked up, said, "Hey, Vinnie, what you up to?" and grinned, too.

Vince stepped inside. "Nothing much. You running the place now, Bruce?"

Bruce Rivers nodded. "Pop still owns it but he doesn't come in much anymore. He made me manager."

"Well all right, buddy!" Vince aimed a friendly punch at the other's arm and then held up the thumb and forefinger of each hand as if framing a newspaper headline. "Glenwood High boy makes good."

Rivers, embarrassed a little, smiled and said, "Cut it out, Vinnie. So what are you doing, really? I've got to go downtown. Want to ride along?"

Vince considered the offer. "Sure, why not?"

AS RIVERS DROVE WEST ON EUCLID THEY REMINISCED A little, talked of former classmates awhile and then fell silent. Vince stared out the window vacantly. How, he wondered, had the armed robbery charge come to be dismissed? A phone call from Romeo Squillini the night before had given him the news but not the details. Romeo wasn't the sort of man you pumped for information. It didn't matter, though, so he forgot it, turned to Rivers and asked, "Where we headed?"

"The Garfield Building. I have to pick up a few things there."

Vince chuckled. The Garfield Building was the wholesale jewelry center of Cleveland. "Maybe I will, too," he said, "if you think I can get away with it."

Rivers laughed. "Same old Vinnie. Not a chance, big fella."

They parked a block from the place, an ugly stone relic on the east end of the downtown business district. Vince Levandowski was well

acquainted with the Garfield Building. He often had looked it over hungrily, sometimes had pointed out that it was a plum ripe for the picking but the word from above was, "Lay off."

As they entered the lobby a harried looking, sad-eyed man of middle years stepped from the elevator. A large merchandise case was in each hand and a smaller one was tucked under one arm. His face brightened when he saw Rivers. "Bruce," he said, "How are you?" He set the cases on the floor and extended a scrawny, veined hand.

"Fine, Bernie," Rivers replied, gripping the hand. "When did you get in town?"

"Just last night, Bruce." The man was wearing a heavy overcoat that hung loosely from sloping shoulders. He wiped perspiration from his face with a handkerchief. The temperature outside was near seventy. "I was going to call you. I have some beautiful merchandise with me, really beautiful. Will you be at the store this afternoon?"

Rivers shook his head. "No, but we're open tonight. Could you stop by then? Say about seven-thirty?"

"Of course, Bruce, of course. Always at your convenience." The man stooped and retrieved his cases. He said, "At seven-thirty, then," and hurried away.

Vince Levandowski grinned. He touched the elevator button and asked, "Who was that guy?"

"Bernie Friedman, an independent salesman from New York. He carries a good line."

"Looks like a real character."

Rivers chuckled. "Yeah, I guess he is. Tries too hard to please. He's kind of shy except when he's talking about jewelry. Bernie's okay, though."

AS THEY LEFT THE BUILDING HALF AN HOUR LATER VINCE said, "Think I'll stay downtown awhile as long as I'm here. Thanks for the lift Bruce."

"Sure you don't want a ride? How'll you get back?"

"I'll just wander around awhile and then hop a bus. See you later, buddy."

He walked back to Euclid and then west again toward the Terminal Tower. After a few blocks he entered an office building with a bank of telephones along one wall of a large lobby. He stepped into a booth, closed the door and dialed a number.

After two rings a raspy voice said, "Brown Enterprises, Squillini speaking."

"Romeo, this is Vince. I got something. A jewelry salesman at

seven-thirty tonight outside Rivers Jewelry Store on Euclid."

"I dunno, kid. They usually carry a bunch of junk."

"This one's good, I'm pretty sure."

"Hold on a second." Vince was aware of a hand-over-mouthpiece conversation and then, "You really think it's something worthwhile, kid?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Okay, then. Fill me in."

Vince talked a minute and then Squillini said, "Okay, kid, we'll take care of it. Make sure you're in public from about seven to eight. Have lots of people around you, Vince."

"Sure, Romeo."

Squillini dropped the phone and turned to a large man in a maroon dressing gown. "I dunno, Digger," he said. "Maybe it's something and maybe it's not."

The large man looked up from his breakfast and newspaper. He removed gold-rimmed glasses and ran a hand through salt-and-pepper hair. "It's worth a shot," he said. "Set it up."

Squillini lit a cigarette, thought for a moment and then picked up the phone again. When it was answered he said, "Ted, I gotta job for tonight. Come on down and bring Cardona."

Squillini jabbed a finger against the receiver button. When he heard the tone he dialed another number. "Frank Jablecnik," he said and then, after a pause, "Don't gimme none a that crap, just get him." A longer pause and then, "Frankie, you better wise up that guy that answered. This is Romeo. I need wheels for an hour at seven tonight. Nothing fancy. You and Lou handle it. Drop it off to Ted and Rocky at Euclid and Shaw. Seven o'clock."

He hung up and looked at the other man again. "Ted Friedlander and Rocky Cardona are coming over. Jablecnik and Petri are gonna take care of the car."

Digger Brown nodded and continued reading his newspaper.

After hanging up, Frankie Jablecnik walked to the rear of the body shop where Lou Petri was hammering a fender. "Romeo called," he said when Petri stopped work and looked up. Jablecnik took a small notebook from a shirt pocket under his coveralls, flipped pages, studied one a minute and said, "Got a job for seven tonight on the east side. How about that white Chevy at the tool and die place? When was the last time you checked it?"

"A week ago. It's okay from three to midnight."

Jablecnik nodded. "It'll do." He flipped pages again, saying "Any ideas for a backup?"

"There's that blue '78 Ford at the same place or that old green Chevy on out at the X-ray plant. You got more in that book, too."

Jablecnik put the notebook back in his pocket. "That's enough, we're okay. Meet you at the bar at six."

THE PARK BORDERED THE STREET ACROSS FROM RIVERS Jewelry Store so Bernie Friedman had no problem finding a parking space. There was a nip in the late fall air now that the sun was down so he put on the heavy overcoat again before going to the trunk for his cases. He had removed one case when a soft voice told him, "Put it back in for now, pal and get in the car."

The rubber mask was so natural looking that several seconds passed before Friedman realized the man was wearing one. He knew at once what the hard object pressed against his side was. He replaced the case, closed the trunk and then with shaking fingers unlocked the door and slid behind the wheel.

"Unlock the other one," the soft voice commanded and Friedman did. Another man opened it and climbed in beside him. He, too, wore a lifelike rubber mask and had a gun.

The first man walked to a car parked a short distance ahead, entered it and pulled from the curb. "Follow him," said the man seated next to Friedman.

The two cars turned in at the park entrance. After a hundred yards the white Chevrolet in the lead drew to the side of the road and Friedman stopped behind it. The three men got out and the cases of merchandise were quickly transferred to the Chevrolet.

When the switch was completed the soft-voiced man walked to where Friedman cowered against the door of his car. He nodded toward a grove of trees and said, "Walk over there."

Friedman, his breathing labored, whispered, "Don't hurt me. Please don't hurt me."

The soft-voiced man laughed quietly. When they were under the trees he said, "Take off your clothes. Everything but your shorts."

"No, please — "

"Take 'em off. Fast." The voice, still soft, now was harsh, too. Friedman did as he was told. When he stood shivering in his shorts the other man scooped the clothes from the ground, removed the keys from a pocket and walked back to Friedman's car. He threw the clothes inside, locked both doors, dropped the keys in the trunk and slammed the lid. The two men got in the white Chevy and drove away.

A startled motorist taking a shortcut through the park a few minutes later speeded up when he saw a man clad only in polka-dot shorts

standing beside the road waving both arms. Another weirdo, the driver thought. He stopped at the first phone booth and called the police. The two officers in a squad car that arrived after ten minutes found Bernie Friedman beating against the window of his car with a rock far too small for the job.

CASEY STOOD IN THE DOORWAY OF THE INVESTIGATORS room. His eyes roved from face to face, finally settled on Foley's. Foley stared back. Casey said, "Busy, Ferg?"

"Just winding up an insurance job."

Casey twitched his head a little. "Come on, then."

Foley gathered his papers together and got up. He followed the agency manager to his private office. When they were settled in chairs Foley asked, "What is it?"

"A jewel robbery. Did you see it in the paper?"

"The salesman? Yes, I saw it."

"We have to check it out."

A member of the Jewelers Protective Association?"

"I don't know yet. Whether he is or not, we have to report to them on it."

Foley nodded. "I had forgotten."

Casey took a cigar from his jacket pocket. "What's left to do on the insurance job?"

"Just talk to the subject."

Casey rolled the tip of the fat cigar between his lips. He removed it from his mouth and studied the result. "What part of town?"

"East. Off Euclid near Eddy Road."

"Good." Casey handed Foley a cutting from the *Plain Dealer*. "This is all I can give you right now. I'll get one of the girls to make out an assignment sheet later. Work it in with the other." He struck a match, held the flame a little below the cigar, puffed rapidly and then exhaled a cloud of yellowish smoke. "Any questions?"

Foley shrugged. "How much time?"

"Take the rest of the day. After that we'll see what develops."

Foley stood up. "Want me to check in after lunch?"

"Yeah, give me a call. Maybe we'll have more to go on by then."

FOLEY HAD LITTLE HEART FOR THE INSURANCE JOB. HE thought about it as he drove east on Euclid. He had ripped the woman's story apart so easily. A five minute walk from Wellington's National Detective Agency on Public Square to the office of the Clerk of Courts. Ten minutes more checking files and he had all he needed. The

rest would be window dressing.

Why hadn't the insurance company done that on its own? he wondered. It was possible that they had, of course. Perhaps all the company really wanted was an interview with the subject under pretext. An outsider would be needed for that.

Marie Gettis was suing the transit company for \$50,000. She had been a standee on a bus that pulled from the curb with a severe lurch. Her right arm was broken in two places when she was hurled to the floor. The suit contended that she had suffered permanent loss of the use of her arm.

Beginning an insurance job by checking the court files was an agency routine. Sometimes it paid off. It had with Marie Gettis.

Four years before the accident on the bus she had been involved in another suit. In a crowded nightclub on a Saturday night she had been standing near the swinging door to the kitchen. A waiter carrying a loaded tray hurried through the door. They collided and both crashed to the floor along with the tray. Marie Gettis broke her right arm and the suit claimed she had lost the use of it permanently. The case was settled out of court shortly before the trial date.

How many times, Foley wondered, could you permanently lose the use of the same arm?

He had driven from the Clerk of Courts office to the nightclub. It was little more than a large tavern and just clean enough to keep its food and alcoholic beverage licenses. The owner recalled the incident immediately. Marie Gettis had been at fault, he said. She had been drunk and staggered in front of the waiter. Although nearly six years had gone by he remembered to the penny how much he had lost when the tray hit the floor.

Marie Gettis lived in an old apartment building three blocks from the nightclub. The neighborhood had been steadily decaying for thirty years or more. Spacious houses, formerly occupied by reasonably well-to-do families, had been converted to small efficiency units. Scattered among them were three- and four-story brick apartments that once, long ago, had been fashionable. Signs in front of shabby business places proclaimed that easy credit was available inside. The streets were littered and foul smelling. Mangu dogs and scrawny, mean-eyed cats prowled the alleys and back lots.

Foley had posed as a credit investigator while making the required check of the neighborhood. Statements from at least three persons had to be included in his report. From the brief interviews he formed a mental picture of Marie Gettis. A cheerful, friendly woman in her early forties. Always willing to help when someone was in need of it.

Deserted years ago, according to the neighbors, by a rodent of a husband.

She had been out the previous afternoon. Now Foley had to return, take a chance that she might be on guard because someone told her a man had been around checking on her. In this case it didn't really matter. In some it did and then he would have talked to the subject first. Seeing Marie Gettis was only a formality, something he was doing merely to satisfy one more requirement of the assignment.

Foley parked a block from her apartment. He put the raincoat and hat he had worn the day before in the trunk. He sorted through a box containing a variety of articles that could alter his appearance a little and picked out a pair of dime-store eyeglasses with lenses of clear glass. A sharp-eyed neighbor might recognize him as the credit investigator of the previous afternoon but he would go ahead and take his chances. The job didn't warrant sending out a second man to interview the subject.

Foley rigged a white sling that was in need of laundering so that it fit his right arm. A clipboard holding a stack of printed survey forms completed his props for the pretext. It was called roping and he was an expert at it.

He walked quietly along the dim hallway and knocked softly on the door of the woman's apartment, hoping the people he had talked to the day before wouldn't hear him, open their doors a crack and peek out.

Marie Gettis opened her own door no more than six inches. She stood behind it, peering around its edge in the defensive way that people do in such neighborhoods.

Foley fumbled with the clipboard and smiled. "Hello," he said. "I wonder if you could help me? I'm making a recreational survey of the area. It'll only take a minute." He smiled again, a pleading, little-boy smile.

She smiled back at him. "I'll try." She swung the door wide. "Come on in."

Foley looked around at the worn furnishings and faded wallpaper. "Nice place," he said. "Comfortable."

She wrinkled her nose. "It's not much but it's home." Then she laughed a little, patted her hair and waved him to a chair at a large, round table that was all that separated the living area from the kitchenette.

He struggled to get the clipboard in position, took a pen from his jacket pocket with his left hand and carefully placed it in his right one. He sighed as though the effort had tired him.

She nodded toward the sling. "What happened?"

Foley grinned sheepishly. "Fell off a ladder a month ago."
"You act like it still hurts."

He shrugged. "Not much. Mainly it's the inconvenience. I'm beginning to wonder if it's ever going to heal right."

She laughed again. "Don't worry, it will. Look at this one. It's been broken twice and it's as good as new." She maneuvered her right arm to show him it was.

Foley sighed, inwardly this time so she wasn't aware. Why did she have to be so cooperative? Why were people so quick to let their guard down with him? He almost wished the arm hung uselessly at her side or was stiff and contorted. He liked her. He would rather be able to report that she was deserving of a large settlement. Obviously life had dealt her some hard blows but still she managed to be pleasant. Optimistic, even. His job would be easier if she were belligerent.

"Care for a cup of coffee?"

He started to say no, saw the almost eager look on her face and instead said, "That would be good." She didn't receive many visitors, he decided. To her it was a special occasion.

He watched her put a spoonful of instant coffee in two cups and add hot water from a kettle. She set the cups on a tray and then took a carton of milk from the refrigerator, poured a little into a small pitcher with pale roses on its side and put it and a matching sugar bowl beside the cups. She placed several donuts taken from a plastic bag on a plate and then carried the tray to the table.

Foley drank his coffee black but he put a little cream and a little sugar in his cup. Why had he done that? he wondered. He wasn't hungry but he ate a donut anyway. They talked a while. When his cup was empty Foley picked up the pen again and filled in the questionnaire. As he left she stood in the doorway and said, "Now don't worry, that arm will be fine." He smiled back at her.

LIGHT RAIN FELL FROM A LOW GRAY SKY. FOLEY DROPPED the sling and eyeglasses in the trunk of his car, retrieved his raincoat and hat. The roping had left him with an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. Some insurance jobs affected him that way. Marie Gettis, he thought, would gladly have settled for her medical expenses and enough more to cover her time off work. An ambulance chaser had talked her into trying for the big score. The lawyer would keep half for himself, of course.

Fog began drifting in off the lake as he drove toward the central police station. Red, green and amber halos ringed the traffic lights and his tires sang a dismal tune on the wet pavement. Gloom settled over

him as the gray mist enveloped the city. What would Marie Gettis receive after his report was filed? he wondered.

He was told Lieutenant Begley was handling the jewel robbery. Foley found him in a hallway talking to another detective. He stood a few feet away until Begley turned to him.

"The jewelry salesman, right?" Begley said.

Foley nodded. "Anything on it?"

Begley shrugged, scowling. "Everything and nothing. Come on, I'll fill you in."

Foley followed him to a desk in one corner of a squad room. Begley nodded toward a chair and slumped in another behind the desk. "Ever hear of a guy named Vince Levandowski?" he asked.

"Sounds a little familiar."

"A tall, blond kid about twenty-six or -seven. Carries a gun for the Glenwood Gang."

"He did it?"

Begley shook his head. "No. He was at a party. Must have been two dozen people there. Levandowski did everything but a song and dance routine to attract attention while the robbery was going on."

"So how does he fit in?"

"Let me ask you one, Ferg. Suppose you're a jeweler and you're going to a wholesaler to pick up stock. Would you take an armed robber with you?"

Foley chuckled. "Maybe, if I didn't have money to pay for it. You mean that's what happened?"

Begley nodded. "Bruce Rivers took Levandowski along to the Garfield Building yesterday morning. They ran into Friedman, the salesman, and he told Rivers he would be out at seven-thirty last night. You can guess what happened after that."

"How much did they get?"

"Friedman claims it had a retail value of \$150,000. He says it's insured for fifty." Begley chewed the end off a cigar and spit it into a wastebasket. "I never have much faith in what people tell me after they've been robbed. Inflation isn't in the same ball game with the way things jump in value once they've been stolen."

"So where do you stand?"

"We're finished, unless something new develops and I don't think it will. Levandowski's down the hall right now but we'll have to turn him loose. We'll keep checking the fences but it won't lead to anything."

"How did Levandowski happen to be with Rivers?"

"They grew up together in Glenwood. Levandowski just happened to drop by the store."

"Think Rivers was in on it?"

Begley shook his head. No, it was pure coincidence. A helluva dumb play on Rivers' part but that was all. Levandowski passed the word to Digger Brown and one of the inner circle set it up. Probably Rick McCarthy or Romeo Squillini. A couple of their car specialists took one off a factory lot and turned it over to the two guys who did the job. They handed the jewels over to somebody else and ditched the car on Shaw just off Euclid.

"The salesman says one of the gunmen was a big guy with a soft, soothing voice. I'd bet my shirt it was Ted Friedlander but there's no way in hell to hang it on him. He claims he was shopping at a discount store all evening and his wife backs him up, naturally. A couple of clerks who know him say Friedlander was in the store for a long time but they can't pinpoint just when it was. There's just no way we could get a conviction."

Foley tapped his fingers together, studied Begley through a haze of cigar smoke. "So that's it?"

"Right. We'll file it away along with a cabinet full of other Glenwood Gang jobs. Knowing what happened and doing something about it are two different things."

"Are you saying you never make an arrest out of the Glenwood Gang?"

"No, Ferg, you know we do. But not often and then it's usually when a couple of them decide to freelance. A few months ago they got Levandowski and some hotshot out of Pittsburgh for holding up an all-night food store in East Liverpool. Caught 'em before they got out of town and the clerk made positive identifications. A few days ago when they were preparing for trial he decided he wasn't so sure after all so they ended up dropping the charges."

"What happened?"

Begley shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? Somebody probably leaned on him or slipped him a few bucks. Who knows?"

"Digger Brown?"

"Not personally, you can be sure of that. Probably one of the Glenwood bunch or maybe somebody out of Pittsburgh. They accept serving time now and then as an occupational hazard but that doesn't mean they won't try to prevent it when they can. Brown doesn't like having too many of them out of circulation, it can slow up his operation."

Foley grinned and shook his head. He stood up and said, "I'll have to go through the motions. I'll let you know if I run across anything."

"You won't." Begley got up, too. "Want to see Levandowski before

you go?"

"Sure."

Foley followed Begley back to the hallway and on to a small interrogation room. A detective was seated at one side of a table. Across from him a husky young man slouched in a chair, trimming his fingernails.

"Well, Vince," Begley said, "are you ready to tell us about it?"

Levandowski grinned. "Tell you what, lieutenant? I was partying last night. You know it, you checked it out."

"Who'd you tell about running into the salesman with Rivers?"

Levandowski raised his brows and held up his palms. "Nobody, lieutenant. I never gave it another thought."

"Okay, Vince, have it your way." Begley scowled at him. "Until another day, anyway. Go ahead, take off."

"Thanks, lieutenant." Levandowski grinned again and leisurely got out of his chair. "Sorry I can't help you but like I said, I was partying."

Begley continued to scowl. "We'll be seeing you again, Vince. Keep it in mind."

"Always a pleasure to talk to you, lieutenant." Still grinning, Levandowski walked out.

Begley turned to Foley. "Good luck, Ferg. Hope the J.P.A. isn't counting on an arrest."

Foley smiled. "They just like to keep tabs. Thanks, Herb." He followed Levandowski down the hall.

TALKING TO RIVERS AT THE JEWELRY STORE TURNED UP nothing new. Neither did interviewing other businessmen along the street or looking over the scene of the robbery in the park. Downtown again, Foley went to a small grille on East Ninth for lunch. The food was passable and the service impersonal, a good place to think undisturbed. He patronized the grille half a dozen times a month and always was greeted as a total stranger. He reviewed the morning over a corned beef sandwich and coffee.

What did he know? As Begley said, everything and nothing. What could he do? Talk to the salesman. Write out a report. Forget it. If it were a TV show he would find a way to break it wide open. He could see no way to do it. He might, provided someone was willing to pay for a lengthy undercover job. That could take months. No one would pay but even if someone would, he couldn't do it personally. He was known

to some members of the Glenwood Gang, Levandowski included now. His cover wouldn't hold, not even for a day.

The rain had stopped so he walked the few blocks to Friedman's hotel. It was a cheap walk-up over a pawn shop and surplus store. There was no lobby, just a desk on the second floor. The neighborhood was a bad one.

After settling in a chair in Friedman's room, Foley said, "Seems like a strange place for a jewelry salesman to stay."

"For eighteen years I have," Friedman replied. "As long as I have been coming to Cleveland."

"It's a miracle you haven't been robbed right here."

"No trouble. Ever."

Foley shrugged. Friedman was red-eyed, tense. He hasn't slept, Foley thought. A pathetic man. A failure. A lifetime spent on the fringes of a lucrative business. A nervous person by nature and he would be worse now. The robbery would leave permanent scars. His life, no bargain to begin with, would never be quite the same again.

The interview was brief. Foley learned a few things that Begley hadn't mentioned. Nothing of importance, just minor details to pad out his report. The undernourished salesman needed reassurance. Foley could think of nothing to say that might help him. He left Friedman standing at the window in trousers and undershirt, staring at the traffic below.

Foley called Casey from a phone booth. "Come on in, Ferg," the agency manager said. "Something's come up. The insurance company's been contacted and is going to buy back the jewels."

"How did they know who carried the insurance?"

"I have no idea. Come on in and we'll discuss it."

When Foley finished his story Casey leaned back, put one foot on his desk and lit a fresh cigar. When it was burning to his satisfaction he stroked his pencil-line mustache, chuckled and said, "Remind me not to call on Bruce Rivers when I need someone to do a little heavy thinking."

Foley flipped his notebook shut. "Too bad they can't charge him with contributory negligence. His stupidity could have gotten someone killed."

"It's too late now to worry about that part of it. By the way, who do you know in the Glenwood Gang?"

"I don't really know any of them. I have a nodding acquaintance with a few. Why?"

"We're going to handle the exchange for the insurance company. I should say *you* are. The contact man specified you when the arrange-

ments were made."

"Foley frowned. "Why me, I wonder? That's strange."

"I don't think so. They want someone they'll recognize."

"You're right, I guess. When and where?"

"They'll call at five o'clock and tell you. Someone from the insurance company will drop the money off here in a little while."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five thousand."

Foley whistled. "I'd better call Lieutenant Begley," he said.

"I've already handled it. He'll be standing by for a call. You've got a couple of hours so you might as well work on your reports."

THE PHONE RANG AT ONE MINUTE AFTER FIVE. FOLEY AND Casey picked up extensions simultaneously. "Leave right now," a muffled voice said. "You've got two minutes to hit the street. Walk around Public Square past the cathedral and then south. Keep walking until you're contacted."

Foley picked up the briefcase containing the money and Casey said, "I'll phone Begley."

Ten seconds remained of the two minutes when Foley stepped from the revolving door onto the sidewalk. A car was parked in the loading zone in front of the building and three sample cases were on the sidewalk beside it.

"Over here, Foley," a man called from the car. The rubber masks the man and the driver were wearing were so lifelike that Foley at first was unaware they were masks at all.

"There's the stuff," the man said. "Let's have the briefcase."

"Don't you want to count it?" Foley asked. It was happening too fast but that didn't really surprise him.

The man in the car laughed hoarsely. "We trust you."

"How do I know the jewels are all here?"

"You know damn well they are. Now give me the case."

Foley handed it in the window and the car pulled away. He noted the license number, picked up the cases and struggled back through the revolving door.

Casey looked up in surprise. "You back already? God, you haven't been gone five minutes."

"They were waiting right outside the door. Call Begley for me. I got the license number, for all the good it'll do."

Begley called back a few minutes after seven. "No dice, Ferg," he said. "The car was stolen out at the X-ray plant. The owner was working, didn't know it was gone. The guys in the car going out to talk to

him spotted it parked a block away before they even got there."

Well, Foley thought after hanging up, it figured. Still, until it had been checked out, there was a ray of hope. Now there wasn't.

Casey opened the door of the investigators room a few minutes later. "You still here, Ferg?" he said. "Better call it a day."

Foley nodded. "Yeah, it's been a dandy."

Casey laughed. "So you want to be a private eye."

"Sometimes I wonder why. I've been trying to separate the winners and losers. So far I haven't had any luck."

Casey sat down across the table from him. "Forget it, Ferg. You can't figure things like that out. You've been around long enough to know it, too. Drop it and let's get a drink and something to eat."

"The jewelry salesman," Foley said. "Friedman, he's a loser. He'll never really get over it."

Casey shook his head. "Forget that angle if you're going to be crazy enough to try and sort it out. He's getting his stock back so he'll come out even."

"Marie Gettis, then. She's a loser."

"The woman with the insurance claim? Hell, she'll still get about three thousand. So she splits it with her lawyer and they each have fifteen hundred. Not big winners but still winners."

Foley twitched his shoulders. "So I guess that leaves the insurance companies."

Casey laughed and shook his head again. "The insurance companies, you've got to be kidding. The one stood to lose at least ten thousand on the insurance claim. Maybe as much as twenty-five. They're seven thousand ahead, minimum. The other would have had to hand the jewelry salesman fifty thou so they're twenty-five to the good. Anyway you look at it they're both winners."

Foley smiled. "You're right, I suppose. The Glenwood Gang is richer by twenty-five thousand, too."

Casey nodded. "Right. Say a thousand to each of the car artists and a couple to the ones who pulled the robbery. That's one, two, four, six thousand. Probably a couple to Levandowski and a thousand apiece to the two who made the exchange. That adds up to ten thousand and leaves fifteen for Digger Brown's kitty. If they had fenced the stuff they would have gotten about ten per cent so they're ten thousand ahead."

"The agency made a little money so I guess everybody's a winner."

"The agency made damn good money for handling the exchange. How much did you make, Ferg, including a couple of hours on the insurance job yesterday?"

Foley ran the fingers through his mind. "About seventy-five dollars."

Casey stood up, grinning. "There's your answer. You're the loser. Come on, let's get that drink." •



With Pa in jail I was alone and scared. Now it wasn't just the church fire that we had to worry about. There was a murder charge along with it!

Trial by Fire

by HAL CHARLES

AS I SLOWLY GAZED AROUND THE CROWDED COURTROOM, I couldn't tell who seemed more nervous — Pa or me. My hands felt moist and my tongue was caught on the roof of my mouth like a fly on flypaper.

Judge Combs' steel-gray eyes seemed to look straight into my heart. "Deborah Jo," he repeated in a voice that made me think of God speaking to Adam and Eve in the Garden, "you do understand the importance of telling the truth, don't you?"

Stuffed into Perky's Feed and Grain Store were all of the Creary County folks who'd come to town for the trial. The tall, gaunt figure of Reverend Wilkes sitting beside his china doll wife. The Widow Lincoln, who ran our boarding house at the end of Main Street. Her son Jimmy, who was a year older than me and my only friend in town. And in the front row squatted the bulldog figure of Killis Bullinger. He owned Bullinger Distillery where everybody in town worked. Somebody had said that without his famous bourbon the town would dry up and die.

Judge Combs pointed his gavel at me as if it was a squirrel gun. "Deborah Jo, what I want you to do is to tell me everything you remember about Sunday night."

I looked down at my shoes. My little toe was through one and my big toe almost through the other. I was afraid that what I would say might hurt Pa. "After Pa and me left the church?"

"Yes. Before the fire."

I stole a glance at Pa, who sat motionless on the other side of The Judge, then began to tell the story as best as I could recollect. "After the service Pa and me had started back to Mrs. Lincoln's when he suddenly remembered we hadn't been paid yet. So we headed back down Main Street to Silver Creek Church. By the time we got there most folks had cleared out, 'cept Reverend Wilkes and a couple of men. They had turned over the altar, the very one Pa had used to preach from earlier that night, and were playing poker on it."

Several ladies in front of me gasped. "The men weren't real happy to see us, 'specially The Reverend. I guess with all that gambling he didn't have the money to pay Pa. He'd promised us \$10 for each night Pa filled the church. Everybody knows Pa's the best revival preacher there is — he could fill the biggest church in Louisville. You were there Sunday night. You saw there wasn't an empty seat." I looked at Pa's face. When he was preaching, his black eyes burned brightly — now they looked like two lumps of coal. "I keep the books for Pa. He's not too good with figures. We were owed \$70, so I spoke up. That really made The Reverend mad."

"What happened?"

Somebody's eyes were a-burning a hole in me, so I didn't look up. "Reverend Wilkes started making up excuses why he couldn't pay. Now Pa's a man of honor and he got riled. He grabbed The Reverend's coat and shook him like a dog shakes a rat. The other men stood up, but Pa stared them back into their seats."

I didn't tell the judge Pa could have taken them all on. He's as big and strong as one of those travelling wrestlers at the county fair. Last year in Corbin when a wagon broke at the Fourth of July picnic, Pa held up the back end while some men replaced the wheel.

Judge Combs looked down at me. "Deborah Jo, in these parts it's not uncommon for someone to use fire as an instrument of revenge. Burning a man's property is bad enough, but to set a church on fire is unspeakable. Now, is there anything else you want to tell us? Was anything said?"

"Well," I stammered, "Pa shoved the reverend down in the chair, said he didn't want his filthy money anyway, then quoted 2 Thessalonians 7-8."

"Do you recall the exact words?"

"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

That set the townsfolk off. A bearded man in the back of the store

yelled something vile, and a couple of others grabbed a rope. Judge Combs banged his gavel, and Pa pulled his huge frame out of the chair. Before anything could happen, though, the judge called a recess and had the sheriff take Pa off to jail for the night.

I was glad Pa went peacefully. Most times he was mild as a lamb. Other than Sunday night I'd only seen him lose his temper twice. Once in Bowling Green I could understand. Pa thought a man overcharged us for some groceries. As I said, Pa's not too good with arithmetic. He got so mad he would have stuffed that grocer in a pickle barrel if I hadn't convinced him the poor man's figures were right. The other time was just last Thursday evening. I was sitting on the backporch swing with Jimmy Lincoln talking about what we wanted to do when we grew up. All of a sudden Pa burst out the back door. His eyes burning, he yanked me out of the swing. "What do you think you're doing?" he shouted, and before I could answer he sent me upstairs to our room.

WITH PA IN JAIL I WAS ALONE AND SCARED. HE WAS ALL I had. When I was just a baby, Ma disappeared. Pa would only say, "She went away." As far back as I could remember, Pa and me had travelled from town to town. We were a team. I would open each revival meeting by playing the piano and singing "Bringing in the Sheaves" just the way he taught me. Then, after some deacons passed the plate, Pa would preach. He only had a few sermons, but he could hold any congregation spellbound for an hour. By the time he finished they would come pouring down the aisles to get right with God.

Up in my room I tried praying for Pa, but that wasn't enough. I wanted to see him. So a little after sundown I headed back into town. The jail was dark, and somebody was talking to Pa.

I couldn't be sure who the voice was, but he was telling Pa how he shouldn't have come back to Somerville after all these years. That surprised me because Pa had told me he'd never been here before. Then the voice told Pa he would get him out of jail if Pa would pack his bags that night. Pa said he hadn't done anything wrong and wasn't going to run again.

When I heard the hobnail boots coming toward the door, I hid behind the rainbarrel. The figure went in the other direction, so I couldn't see who it was.

I was confused and as cold as the water in the barrel. Pa had always been my solid rock, the only person I could trust. I felt betrayed. He had told me a lie about Somerville. Had he lied to me about other things too?

Instead of going into the jail to see Pa, I wandered back to the board-

ing house and locked myself in my room. I had never felt so alone. I don't know how long it was before I fell into sleep.

I heard yelling and looked out my window. A halo of light perched upon a grove of trees at the other end of town. People were running toward it. A bell clanged and shouts filled the night air. I threw on my shoes and overalls, then headed for the bright glow.

I could feel the heat even before I saw the jagged yellow flames. It was like the earth had opened up, and the fires of hell were clawing for the sky, destroying everything in their path.

A solitary figure in a black frock coat stood close. I looked up to see the hell-fires reflected in his eyes. It was Pa. "No! No!" I screamed, putting my hands over my eyes.

Somebody was shaking me. "Easy, child. It's only a dream, a bad dream."

Mrs. Lincoln pulled me to her gingham dress and squeezed me tight. It was the first time I could recall being held close like that, and I liked it. "There now," she whispered, "things are gonna work out."

"No, they're not," I cried. "I'm going to lose everything. Pa's going to jail and I don't know what will happen to me."

"Don't you fret none, child. You've got a home here in Somerville. Folks around here remember Hosea Taylor, how he broke away from his wild ways and became a man of God."

I stopped crying. "Then Pa did live here once?"

"You mean he's never talked about the days before he became a preacher, about how he used to work at Bullinger's Distillery, about Mary?"

"Mary?"

"Land a Goshen, your mother, dear."

"What about my mother?"

"Hosea never told you?" She pulled me deeper into the folds of gingham and patted me on the head. "You've got to get some sleep, child. Yes, I think sleep would be the best thing for you."

THE NEXT MORNING I SAT WITH MRS. LINCOLN AND JIMMY AS Killis Bullinger took the stand. Being a fair man, Judge Combs wanted to hear what everybody had to say before he passed judgement on Pa. Though Mr. Bullinger hadn't been in the Silver Creek Church when Pa had it out with the reverend or in town when the church burned, he had asked to testify. He said he had more interest in the church than anyone else in town.

He told how years ago when his original home had burned to the

ground he had taken it as a sign. With only the help of Reverend Wilkes, he had built the Silver Creek Church on the very foundation of his homestead. He had even convinced the young preacher, a local boy who'd just got back from a seminary up East, to stay on as a full-time minister. On the front row Reverend Wilkes beamed at the mention of his name, but his wife's expression remained as fixed as one of those statues in the town square. Since then, even through hard times, Mr. Bullinger had contributed enough money to keep the church on its feet.

What Mr. Bullinger said next gladdened my heart. He felt that since there were no eyewitnesses to the burning it would be next to impossible to prove Pa was guilty. And, even if he was, Mr. Bullinger announced he forgave him and thought the town should too. Wasn't it their Christian duty?

The townsfolk were nodding in agreement when the backdoor flew open and in rushed an old man who looked like he hadn't washed in a month of Sundays. He was waving his hands and shouting. Jimmy told me his name was Mo Ballou, a part-time everything around town.

The judge banged his gavel and called for order, telling Ballou he'd better have a good reason for busting in.

"Well, your honor, you see I was poking around in what's left of the church. Thought I might be able to save something . . . for the town, don't you see. Under some charred boards and loose dirt I seen it. I could hardly believe these old peepers. I mean, you don't often . . ."

"Out with it,, man." The judge ordered. "What did you find?"

"A body. Well, part of one anyway."

Once again Perky's Feed and Grain broke into an uproar. In a little town like Somerville nothing much ever happens, but now in the space of two days there'd been a church-burning and a body discovered.

WITHIN A FEW MINUTES THE WHOLE TOWN HAD MOVED TO the church site. Everybody could see plain as day what Ballou had been trying to describe. Sticking out of the ground by the stone chimney, the only thing left standing after the fire, was a charred hand.

"Burned the flesh right off," somebody said.

Turning to Pa the judge frowned. "Looks like we've got more than a case of arson here."

The sheriff and some of the local menfolk dug up the rest of the skeleton and carted it off to Doc Whitaker's. Everybody was bussing, trying to figure out who it was that got burned. The problem was that no one was missing. Finally somebody pointed out that Old Man Latta, the town hermit, hadn't been see for weeks. Sheriff Burkhardt went out to his shack, where a shotgun blast and a "Get off my land" left no

doubt that the old farmer was still alive and as grouchy as ever.

While all the guessing was going on, I was thinking about Pa. Nobody was going to listen to Mr. Bullinger's plea for mercy now. I wanted to see Pa. Even if he had lied to me I still loved him. That afternoon the sheriff let me in his cell.

Pa sat hunched over in the corner, a tray of untouched food in front of him. Behind his stubbled face stared two sunken, blood-red eyes.

"Baby-girl, I wish you hadn't come. I don't like you to see me this way."

"Pa," I cried out and ran to him. As he cradled me in his massive arms, I couldn't hold back the tears. "Tell me you didn't do it?"

"I never thought I'd have to tell you that. You know I wouldn't burn a house of God . . . or break the Sixth Commandment."

"But, Pa, you lied to me about never being in Somerville before."

"There are some things a child shouldn't have to face. What happened to me back then is dead."

"But, Pa, I want to know about Ma. Mrs. Lincoln said . . ."

"Some people'd be better off if they stuck to their own knitting. Your mother's gone and that's all there is to it."

"Pa . . ."

"Enough, child!"

I'd heard that tone before. Pa only used it when he'd made up his mind. Nothing was going to change it. Besides, about then Sheriff Burkhart told me my visiting time was up and made me skedaddle.

I don't know why, but I felt an urge to go back to the church. Maybe I just wanted to be alone or maybe I sensed it was the center of everything that had happened to me since we first hit Somerville.

THE SUN WAS SETTING DOWN ON A TALL WALNUT TREE LIKE a hen on her nest when I got to what remained of Silver Creek Church. A breeze had sprung up and it felt a little chilly for late September. I buttoned up the frayed navy sweater and sat down on the stone hearth.

Right in front of me was the large hole left by the sheriff's men when they removed the skeleton. I picked up a splintered stick and began poking around as I thought about what had happened to Pa and me. The more I thought the more I wished I could just jump in that old hole and cover myself up with dirt.

Then something caught my eye. Halfways buried was a shiny object. I got down on all fours and cleared away the dirt. It was a chain. Looked like a locket. I took out my wadded up handkerchief from my overalls and wiped it off. It was gold and heart-shaped.

Well, when I saw what was engraved on it, let me tell you my heart dropped plumb to my shoes. Fast as a scalded cat I ran to the boarding house, where I found Mrs. Lincoln in the kitchen making a stew.

"Land a Goshen, child, you look like the Devil hisself's been chasing you."

I held up the locket in front of her."

A strange look crept across her face as she asked, "Where'd you get that jewel'ry, Deborah Jo?"

"It was my Ma's," I shouted, pointing to the inscription — TO MARY WITH LOVE, HOSEA. "And my Pa, he gave it to her. Now won't you tell me something about them?"

Mrs. Lincoln looked into my eyes, turned the locket over in her hands, then sat down at the kitchen table. Her green eyes got a far-away look. "Like I told you yesterday," she began slowly, "your Pa used to work over at the distillery. Sometimes he'd go up to Louisville with Mr. Bullinger to help him race his horses. Well, one spring Mr. Bullinger came back with a stakes-winner and your Pa with a new bride. From the first day she set foot in Somerville she hated the town and made no bones about it. Folks here tried their best to like her, but soon got fed up with hearing how everything was so much better in Louisville. Then she started complaining how your Pa and his job were a-holding her back. When she had you, though, we kind of figured that would settle her down."

"Did it?"

"Fact is she got worse. Now it's not that your Pa didn't try. Even gave her this here locket as a kind of peace offering. Didn't work though. Not a person in Somerville who don't remember that one scene they had. It was a Friday evening. Hosea'd just got off from the distillery. Stopped by Mr. Bullinger's big, white house to pick her up. She worked there as a housekeeper. Well, anyway, they truly had it out. Strange that I should recollect it now, but the whole town could hear what she yelled at him — I'D RATHER BURN IN HELL THAN SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE IN A HICK TOWN WITH YOU! Wasn't long after she up and disappeared. Nobody round here's seen hide nor hair of her since. All we know is the night she was last spotted Mr. Bullinger's fine home caught on fire. Some folks said she burned it, out of spite. Took one last slap at Somerville before she left for good. It's not a very pretty story. Maybe now you can see why your Pa don't like to talk about it."

Mrs. Lincoln held the gold locket out to me. "Now, child," she asked, "where did you find this?"

Instead of answering I snatched the locket from her and dashed out

the kitchen door. The rest of the night one horrible thought stayed with me.

I SURE DIDN'T WANT TO GO BACK TO COURT THE NEXT MORNING, but Judge Combs was determined to finish Pa's trial. So just after Reverend Wilkes and wife took their seats beside Mr. Bullinger, the judge banged his gavel for silence.

Immediately he called Doc Whitaker up front. After admitting he was just a country doctor without a lot of fancy degrees, the Doc said he knew his business enough to be sure of two things. The skeleton belonged to a woman and it had been in the ground for quite a few years.

Once again people started whispering and poking each other. While the judge calmed them down and allowed how Pa was only on trial for church-burning now, I got to thinking. After what Doc Whitaker had said, I was sure about the skeleton. It was my mother. But why was she buried beneath the church? What had happened to her? Mrs. Lincoln had said everybody thought she had lit off for Louisville.

Right then Reverend Wilkes stood up next to the pork barrel and asked to speak. Straightening his string tie and pulling his white cuffs out of his coat, he cleared his throat.

"Brothers and sisters," he started, "a lot of harsh words have been bandied about in this trial. A few things people think they have seen . . . well, have been distorted a bit." He looked at me fiercely, then lifted his big black Bible from his wife's lap. "I'm sure that you, the good people of Somerville, can like Mr. Bullinger and me find forgiveness in your hearts for our former neighbor here, Mr. Taylor."

As he continued, mentioning that after all Pa was a man of the cloth and quoting from the Bible, his voice began to swell as if he was preaching a sermon. Suddenly a scream interrupted. "Stop it!"

Every eye in Perky's turned to the tiny figure in white sitting on the reverend's left. Her face was beet-red and she was wiping something from it with a fine lace handkerchief as she stood up.

"Esther," commanded her husband, "What's wrong with you?"

"Enough, Jonathan! I've finally had enough of your hypocrisy."

Reverend Wilkes tried to calm her by putting his hand on her shoulder, but she removed it. "It's time these people knew the truth, all of it." The room was so silent I could hear myself breathing. "So while you are telling the good people of Somerville about how they ought to forgive, why don't you tell them about your Saturday card games, where you really go when you take those trips to your Bible conferences, where you . . ."

"Shut up, woman!"

"I've been silent too long, Jonathan."

Judge Combs called for a couple of the ladies to take Mrs. Wilkes outside for a little fresh air to settle her down, but she jerked free and headed for the front of the store.

"Mrs. Wilkes," said the judge, "let me remind you this is a courtroom, and we are here solely to try a man for burning a church."

"That's just it," she said. A wildness came to her eyes, the kind you see in a cornered animal. "I set fire to my husband's church. It was built on lies and sham. The only way to purify it was to burn it to the ground."

The courtroom buzzed like a hornet's nest just knocked loose from a tree. Reverend Wilkes moved toward his wife, his hands outstretched.

"What? You have nothing to say, Jonathan," Mrs. Wilkes shouted, "but then you're good at keeping quiet. For thirteen years you've kept his secret." She pointed at Killis Bullinger. "That's right. Somerville's first citizen. Don't you think it's about time the town knew about our beloved Mr. Bullinger and that woman, Mary Taylor."

With that she broke into tears and rushed for the door, leaving her husband standing alone in front of the town. I don't know if it was the right thing to do, but I just had to tell Judge Combs what I'd discovered. I showed him the locket and told him where I got it.

Immediately Pa leaped from his chair and headed for Mr. Bullinger. "She said she was going to your house that night. Said you'd promised to take her away." Knocking the sheriff aside, Pa grabbed Mr. Bullinger's throat. "No wonder I never could find her — you must have killed her."

Sheriff Burkhart and Mr. Perky pulled Pa away. Fighting for a breath, Mr. Bullinger collapsed into a chair. "I never promised her anything," he gasped, "but Esther's right, Jonathan, it's time we told the truth."

Reverend Wilkes dropped his head kind a like he wished he could a disappeared.

"Hosea, hear me out," Mr. Bullinger pleaded. "The other night I tried to get you to leave town so the whole ugly mess wouldn't have to come out. Now I want it to." Pa, who was being held back, stopped fighting. "Thirteen years ago on a Friday night your Mary did come to my house around nine o'clock. She'd been drinking and was really upset. Told me she'd had it out with you and was leaving town.. She wanted me to give her some money. When I said no, she threatened to tell the whole town we'd been carrying on. Well, I told her to wait in the study while I got the money. You know me. Never married, never

known how to talk to women, so I went to get someone who was used to helping people with problems — Reverend Wilkes."

Everyone looked at the Reverend, who had sunk to the floor like a melted candle.

"When the two of us got back to the house, we found Mary in my study standing in front of the fireplace with a bottle of my best bourbon in her hand. We tried to reason with her, but she went crazy. Started smashing things up. Even threw the bottle at the blazing fire. Before we could move, flames burst up all around her, catching her dress. She started screaming something fierce, but we couldn't get to her. It was hard enough for us to get ourselves out alive. By the time the volunteers arrived, there was nothing left to save. Believe me, Hosea, for thirteen years now I've heard those screams every day. I know I did all I could, but that doesn't help."

Judge Combs leaned forward. "If you were innocent like you claim, Killis, why have you kept Mary Taylor's death a secret all these years?"

"I guess because when it happened we didn't think straight. No matter what really occurred, how would it have looked to the town? A married woman being at my house at night, then dying in a fire. Jonathan said the town was better off without a woman like that anyway. So we buried her on the spot."

"That's why you wouldn't let anybody help you build the church," said the judge. "You were afraid somebody might find the body."

"Yes, that was part of it. But there's more. We felt the need for atonement. Maybe if we built the town a church rather than just rebuilding my house, we could make sort of up for what we'd done. Judge, I'm glad it's finally over. Guilt is one fire you can never put out."

After the courtroom had settled down, Judge Combs said Pa was free to go. As to the matter of the fire, Mr. Bullinger, with his eyes full of tears, offered to pay for rebuilding Silver Creek Church, but the townsfolk decided right then and there they would rebuild it themselves. Mr. Perky donated the nails, and a Mr. Nelson who ran the sawmill said he'd supply the lumber.

The next day Reverend Wilkes and his wife left town. The people of Somerville had a lot of sympathy for what Mrs. Wilkes had been through. They were even willing to give Reverend Wilkes another chance. Everybody could see he was a changed man and understood when he said they were going somewhere to start all over again.

JUST AFTER HAVING LUNCH WITH JIMMY AND MRS. LINCOLN,

Pa asked me to take a walk with him. As we strolled through town, people went out of their way to greet us with smiles and handshakes. At the other end we stopped and sat down on the sunbaked stone hearth.

"I was proud the way you told the judge the truth," he smiled, "even when you thought it might hurt me. The truth is always the best, and I know now I shoulda told you all about your mother long ago."

"I understand, Pa."

"Baby-girl, . . . well, I guess I better not call you that anymore. You're growing up faster than I realized. I feel bad. Here I've been dragging you around with me all these years searching for your mother and I almost lost you. Now," he said putting his arm around me and holding me close, "I've got an important question to ask you. Mr. Perky, Mrs. Lincoln, and some other townsfolk came by last night after you'd gone to sleep. They wanted to know if I would stay on as minister of the new church. I said I'd have to ask you. So what do you think — are we ready to settle down?"

Even before the tears of joy came Pa could read the answer in my eyes.

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The naked man was found in a snowbank. Three bullet holes were in his body, and his fingerprints had been seared with acid. When no one claimed him, the sheriff was afraid he'd have the dead man as a permanent visitor!

The Last of Clyde Dough

by WADE MOSBY

IT COULD NOT BE SAID THAT CLYDE DOUGH HAD NO REDEEMING social values. He was unobtrusive, quiet to a fault and didn't take up much room. What made him X-rated was that he was dead, and that posed a problem for Sheriff Buckminster Fulton.

Clyde somehow had gotten himself into a snow bank alongside Highway 28. Subsequent snows added to the depth of the man as plows sent layer after layer of icy slush and salt spume over his resting place. It wasn't until late March that Clyde's shoes, protruding from the glacier, betrayed the presence of a very solid citizen.

Buck Fulton was accustomed to solving his law enforcement problems by storing them in the county slammer until the D.A. decided on a proper course of action. But it didn't seem right to pop Clyde into a cell when his only apparent offense against society was leaving it.

For its part, society had not dealt kindly with Clyde. Someone, for example, had put three holes in him. From the looks of things, the coroner opined, the holes — in a neat row — had been caused by .30 caliber rifle bullets. Aside from his shoes, Clyde was naked. What's more, his fingerprints had been seared with acid at some point in his life.

The sheriff didn't mean to be inhospitable, but he did wish that Clyde had been dumped a furlong to the east, which would have been in the next county. Clapsaddle County was in the heart of deer country, and nearly every adult male had a .30 caliber rifle.

Nor did anyone seem to want the dead Clyde. Fulton found an old sweatshirt and a pair of bib overalls for his guest, and kept him wrapped in a tarpaulin in the department's four-wheel drive pickup, usually parked in a shed behind the courthouse.

It was something of an inconvenience, since Clyde had to be sat in a corner of the shed every time Deputy Tyrone Fillmore wanted to borrow the truck to visit Hortense Meyer at her farm. And that was two or three times a week.

No doubt about it, despite his redeeming features Clyde was a problem, and would become increasingly so if Fulton didn't find a proper place for him.

Clyde, of course, would have been much better off at Danielson's Furniture Mart and Funeral Home. But times were tough, and the county board wasn't about to spend tax dollars on fancy surroundings for a defunct nonresident.

It would have been nice to slip Clyde into one of those refrigerated drawers in a nice morgue, but Clapsaddle County, far upstate and chronically on the verge of bankruptcy; had never seen the need for big city fripperies. Fulton thought that Sam Ritchie, who ran a taxidermy and fishing tackle store, might give Clyde temporary lodging in his big freezer, the one used to display prize fish in the summer months. Sam wasn't interested.

Buck Fulton began to feel that he was Clyde's next of kin. In a way, he was. He had named him, after all. Since there were John Doe corpses everywhere, Fulton named his guest Clyde Dough. A man deserved a name of his very own.

Clyde's description had been sent around to various places, but nowhere, it seemed, was anyone looking for Clyde. It was then that Fulton hit upon a new idea. He would send out photographs. Clyde wasn't a bad looking chap, and no doubt was somebody's loved one.

FULTON GAVE THE MATTER SOME THOUGHT. SAM RITCHIE was the only photograpfer in the county who didn't charge an arm and a leg (if you'll excuse the expression). Sam took pictures of people with fish they had caught and he had mounted.

Sam's attitude was inhospitable, at best.

"No way am I going to take a picture of a stiff," Sam said. "But I tell

you what I *will* do. I'll show you how to work my camera — it's a good one, a Speed Graphic — and *you* can take the sucker's picture."

Fulton mulled over this suggestion. He himself wasn't into photography, but with a lesson or two from Sam and the assistance of Tyrone Fillmore, perhaps the task could be accomplished.

Fulton nodded. He listened carefully as Sam explained the operation of the camera. Then he tried a few shots himself. Didn't seem all that difficult, once you got the hang of it. Fulton thanked Sam and returned to his office in the courthouse basement.

Tyrone was on duty.

"We got us a job, Tyrone."

"Just name it, Buck."

"We are going to take a picture of Clyde."

"What's he need a picture for? Send it out on his Christmas cards?"

"Something like that," Fulton nodded. "We send it to various law enforcement agencies. Somebody's bound to recognize Clyde. And we'd better do it right away. Winter will not hold on forever, and Clyde has not been looking well."

Problems were immediately apparent. In his reclining position, Clyde wasn't the best of subjects. Besides, Fulton couldn't escape the feeling that it would be disrespectful to stand astride Clyde just to take his picture.

"Got to get him propped up, somehow," Fulton said.

"We could tie him to a stepladder," Fillmore offered.

"Not a bad idea," Fulton agreed. "Yet, it just doesn't seem right. We've gotten kinda used to Clyde, you know."

"Right, Buck. Be a hell of a thing to do to a friend."

"Now here's a better idea, Tyrone. You hold him up and I'll get the picture."

"You sure that would be proper?" Fillmore asked. "Seems a little too familiar to me."

"Not only proper, but friendly. Least we can do for him."

Clyde was not a small man. Fillmore finally got him hoisted onto his feet.

"F'God's sake, take the picture!" Fillmore gasped. "Clyde weighs a ton!"

"You just stand there and hold him up until I get this thing aimed proper," Fulton said.

By the time the sheriff had made sure that the light was right and that Clyde was in focus on the ground glass, Fillmore's brow was beaded with perspiration and his eyes were bulging with effort. There was a flash of light.

"There!" Fulton said with satisfaction. "Now I'd better take a couple more, just to be sure. Steady him, Tyrone!"

Sam Ritchie agreed to make three dozen prints, and Fulton picked them up the next morning. He was quite pleased with the way they turned out, even considering that Tyrone had tended to hog the picture. He got them in the mail that night, complete with Clyde's general description. Now, if the weather held, so would Clyde.

THE MAIL, IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, BROUGHT THREE NOTES asking which corpse was which, plus one letter from a downstate sheriff who said he didn't know the guy in the overalls, but the stiff behind him looked like his brother-in-law who had disappeared on a fishing trip 10 years earlier.

Fillmore hotly denied that he had ever disappeared anyplace, and said he didn't know that downstate sucker from Adam's off ox.

Fulton went outside and watched thoughtfully as workmen were completing an excavation for a courthouse annex. He returned to his office.

"Tyrone, I was just watching the excavators out there," he said, "and thinking that it would be easy to tuck Clyde into a little grave somewhere. Problem is, the Catholics don't want him in their cemetery, and the Protestants don't want him in theirs."

"Would be nice to get him tucked away, comfortable."

"Tyrone, couldn't we just dig a little spot out on Hortense Meyer's farm? We could say a few words over him, and I'm sure that would satisfy everyone."

"No sir! Miss Hortense wouldn't allow that! She came back to that farm after her folks died and left it to her. She had enough of city life. She was married once, you know. Got a divorce from the bum. It's peaceful on that farm. She don't want no mausoleum out there."

"I didn't realize she would be upset," Fulton said. "Well, if nobody wants Clyde, we'll have to do some more thinking."

The phone rang. It was somebody at the State Crime Laboratory. Their Inspector Jaques Baudet was interested in Clyde, and was en route to Clapsaddle County with special examination equipment.

"Looks like we got a home for Clyde," Fulton said. "An inspector for the crime lab is headed our way. He'll probably solve this case in no time and get Clyde off our hands."

"Do we have to get everybody butting in?" Fillmore asked, somewhat testily. "We were gettin' along all right by ourselves."

"Those boys have to have something to do, Tyrone," Fulton said. "Besides, the guy who's coming is Baudet — I think I recall that he's a

Clapsaddle County boy who made good."

THAT AFTERNOON, INSPECTOR BAUDET PULLED HIS "OFFICIAL State Vehicle," a specially equipped station wagon, into the parking spot marked "Sheriff Only" and hustled into the courthouse basement. He walked into the sheriff's office and eyed Tyrone Fillmore with suspicion.

"Haven't I seen you someplace before?" he asked.

"Don't think so," said Fillmore, not liking the man.

"Ah, yes! You're the pop-eyed chap with the corpse! I never forget a face. Name's Baudet — Inspector Jaques Baudet. State crime lab. Where's the sheriff?"

"Went out."

"Went out where? He knew I was coming, didn't he?"

"Yep. In your honor he's gettin' a haircut."

Baudet's eyes narrowed.

"What's your name?"

"Fillmore. Deputy Sheriff Tyrone Fillmore. Clapsaddle County."

"I know what county I'm in, Fillmore. Let's get on with it. Where's the morgue?"

"Don't have one."

"Well, where's the body?"

"Clyde? He's sittin' in the garage — shed out back."

"Sittin' in the garage? Why?"

"I'm usin' the truck tonight."

Baudet felt weak. He found a chair in a corner and sat down, and was glad when Buck Fulton walked in.

"Sheriff Fulton?"

"Right. You're Baudet, I presume. Didn't you used to live around here?"

"I did, sir. On a farm just outside town until I went away to college. Never could forget the old place, so I jumped at the chance to investigate your, ah, Clyde."

"Right. I understand you've done well in your job."

"Not bad, sheriff. I'm in line for top man. The director is about to retire. Now, can I look at your Clyde?"

"Sure. He's right out here in the shed. I'll lead the way."

Clyde looked a little tired; but not bad, considering.

"Do you have an examining table?"

"Sure. Say, Tyrone, clear off the workbench."

"Same old Clapsaddle County, eh, sheriff?" Baudet said.

"Guess we haven't had much reason or money to change," Fulton

replied. "This light OK?"

"It'll have to do. Let's see now. Yes. The wounds. No doubt about it. All the marks of .30 caliber steel-jacketed slugs. Three in a row. Professional job. Possibly a gang type thing. Doubt if he was killed around here — just dumped in your jurisdiction."

"And the fingers?"

"Man probably has a record, somewhere, that he didn't want known."

"Well, if that don't beat all," Tyrone said admiringly.

Baudet continued his examination, dictating medical terms into a tape recorder. At last he was finished.

"Well, sheriff, I'll take care of myself tonight — a few odds and ends to look at around here," he said. "I'll be back in the morning, and then start for the office after I stop in here."

"Taking Clyde with you?"

"I see no reason to do that, sheriff," he said. "I think your office is capable of handling one body, even with the help of Tyrone."

He collected his gear and hustled off again.

Fulton looked at his deputy.

"We're back to square No. 1, Tyrone," he said. "I could have sworn that Clyde had a ride out of here."

"That sonabitch Baudet don't know everything," Fillmore muttered. "Well, if you don't mind, sheriff, I'd like to take off. Miss Hortense has invited me to dinner."

"Go ahead, Tyrone. Phillips will be in soon to handle the night shift."

After Fillmore had left, Buck Fulton went back to the shed and stared at Clyde.

"You poor bastard," he said. "Somebody around here knows something that I don't know. Wish you could talk."

He returned to the office to wait for Phillips.

INSPECTOR BAUDET STRUTTED INTO THE OFFICE AT 8 A.M., full of importance and ready for food.

"How about some breakfast, sheriff? My treat! I found out a few things last night. Tell you about them over bacon and eggs. Is the motel out on Highway 28 OK?"

"Good as any," Fulton replied. "We'll take my car so I can stay in touch with Tyrone here."

Fillmore glanced at the clock as the sheriff's car pulled out onto the street. It was 8:04 a.m. He made a note of it, and then walked out and checked Baudet's station wagon. Locked. It took Fillmore all of 10

minutes to open it. He was busy for the next hour.

Buck Fulton returned to the office alone at 9:14 a.m.

"Well, Baudet is on his way home. I think you were right about him. He doesn't know any more than we know, except for a lot of fancy words. I guess you and I are stuck with Clyde."

Fillmore cleared his throat uneasily.

"Not exactly, sheriff," he finally said. "There are some things that I probably should have told you a long time ago."

Fulton looked at his deputy.

"I'm ready when you are, Fillmore," he said.

"Don't know where to start, really. Well, Clyde's real name is George Meyer, aka Yutch Meyer. At one time he was a hit man for one of the mobs in New York."

"How do you know all this, Tyrone?"

"Miss Hortense told me. Yutch Meyer was her husband. She didn't know what he did to bring home all his cash until he was convicted of a murder in Brooklyn. Then it all came out. She found a job and divorced him. He did 12 years and was paroled."

"Miss Hortense, remember, came back here from New York just two years ago. Last year — November — he found out where she was. He got out here somehow, mostly broke, and looked her up. He was scared silly. There was a contract out on him."

"Sounds to me as if Baudet had it straight — it was a gangland killing of some sort, right?" Fulton put in.

"Wrong, Buck. The sonabitch got out to the farm and demanded that Miss Hortense clean out her savings and give him the whole business, in cash. She said he'd have to give her time, and told him to wait in the barn.

"I went to see Miss Hortense that night. She told me the whole story. I went out to the barn and . . ."

"You killed him, didn't you, Tyrone?"

"Wrong, Buck. He was dead when I got there."

"Didn't you hear the three rifle shots?"

"Sheriff, there weren't any shots at all. The poor bastard fell out of the hayloft onto a pitchfork. That's how I knew that Baudet didn't know a rifle hole from third base."

Fulton whistled.

"You're telling me straight, aren't you, Tyrone? I never knew you to do otherwise."

"We don't change much in Clapsaddle County, Buck. I'm telling it to you straight. Now, Miss Hortense is not proud of her marriage to a criminal, and was deathly afraid someone would find out about it. I saw

that Yutch didn't have fingerprints, and figured I could help her out by getting rid of him."

"You dumped the body in the snowbank?"

"Right you are that time, sheriff. Honest to God, though, I thought I had crossed the county line. It was snowing pretty hard that night. I felt awful when I found out that I had made a mistake of a couple hundred yards. You can guess how I felt when he turned up here and you named him Clyde."

"Poor damned Clyde! I thought he had an honest face. But, Tyrone, without even going into what you did, where does that leave us with Clyde?"

"I was going to get to that, sheriff. Actually, it was Baudet who provided the solution."

"Now, what the hell, Tyrone," Fulton snorted. "He couldn't provide a solution if it fell on him."

Fillmore made a wry grin.

"There's more, Buck. Just a little more."

"Let's have it."

"I tailed Baudet last night. His first stop was the supermarket. He bought all the ice in their freezer — the bagged stuff, you know? And he put it all into a big box that slid out from the rear of that station wagon. I guessed that it was a box for hauling bodies, and figured he'd be around this morning to pick up Clyde.

"So I went on out to see Miss Hortense. Along about 8 p.m., I would guess, we heard shots. Rifle shots. Miss Hortense is a little jumpy these days, and asked what the shooting was about.

"Probably some locals out there, shinin' deer," I told her.

"She wants to know what that means, so I tell her that they shine a searchlight on a deer at night, blinding it momentarily, and shoot the poor thing before it can get its bearings. She says it sounded terrible, and I tell her that it's also very much against the law.

"So she says 'You are the law. Make them stop it,' and so I said I was about to." I could see the searchlight from the house — half mile down the road. I walked to 50 yards of it. It was attached to Baudet's station wagon. As I watch, he hits a deer. He gets it, guts it and drags it back to the wagon.

"And then he hoists the carcass up and puts it in that ice chest."

"Good God!" Fulton whispered. "Did you say anything to him?"

"Not a damn word, sheriff. It had occurred to me that it would be better if I didn't make my presence known."

"Better? Why didn't you arrest the cocky bastard?"

"Buck, come on out to the shed and I'll show you."

Fillmore led the sheriff to the four-wheel drive truck and pulled back the tarpaulin that had served as Clyde's shroud. Beneath it was a freshly killed deer.

"Well, I'd say you got the goods on him, Tyrone. What do we do about Clyde? Say, where the hell is Clyde, anyway?"

"I was getting to that, sheriff. Clyde is in Baudet's ice chest. I put him there while you were at breakfast. I can't see — so long as we keep the deer under wraps — that we'll hear from either of them again."

Fulton looked admiringly at his deputy.

"Kee-ripes! What a surprise that little bastard is in for! Do you think he'll understand that he can't say a damned word about the whole affair? That he'll have to fob off Yutch Meyer as just another unsolved mystery?"

"Yep. And in case he doesn't, there's a note in the chest. It says 'I saw you do it.' "

"Kee-ripes! Did you sign it?"

"Sure," said Fillmore. "I signed it 'Clyde Dough.' "



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Chapter 1 • "THE PURPLE DEATH"

FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE

with **LARRY "Buster" CRABBE**

From the ALEX RAYMOND newspaper feature owned and copyrighted by King Features Syndicate

For years the woman had taken midnight swims in the surf. An interesting idea struck him: suppose she were to drown — accidentally, of course . . .

Comeback

by R. TUTTLE

MARY BLAIR AT FIFTY-TWO WAS A WAN REPLICA OF THE glamorous Mary Blair of the sixties whose movies had grossed millions and whose name had come close to becoming a household word during that period. Bourbon, pills and hectic living had reduced her to a slight figure in faded dungarees and shirt. No bra; she hardly needed one these days. Some of her youthful beauty, classic, well balanced facial features, shoulder-length dark hair, steady blue eyes stood out in the subdued light of Milo's bar but a closer look revealed sagging skin, wrinkles — age. Too much liquor, too many men, and much to much of living for today had sent her into performer's Hell — oblivion.

She was a familiar sight at Milo's Pacific Resort, which was little more than an expensive pit stop on the coast highway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. At Milo's she was a celebrity of sorts. Occasionally, one of her old movies played on late late TV.

A cottage nearby on a tiny beach lot and part ownership in a San Francisco based cosmetic company were all she had of material value. The company was run by Bill Langford, an ex-husband, her first real love and presently her pet hatred. She had difficulty in remembering the string of husbands and lovers that had followed that first divorce but Langford had always remained on the fringe of her life.

IT WAS NINE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING AND MARY WAS alone at the bar sipping a coffee-bourbon mix and munching on heated Danish, her favorite breakfast. Milo kept a coffee urn and a microwave oven behind the bar for his early morning customers. Generally, they waited upon themselves.

Outside, it was a beautiful day with patches of white clouds playing around a blue sky while below, a brisk sea breeze was whipping the blue-green Pacific into a minor frenzy, sending huge rollers roaring to a frothy death on the gleaming expanse of sand and rocks in back of Milo's.

Mary loved the sound of waves crashing along the beach. Such power! Once she had the same power over audiences. They had loved her. And they would love her again — after she made that movie she was planning. Her decision to produce a movie with her as the star was not new. Each month she made the decision only to be talked out of it by Langford who argued that any movie starring an aging Mary Blair would be a disaster and would toss the cosmetic company into the hands of the receivers.

But in Mary's mind, especially after several Irish coffees, Mary Blair was still a star, and any vehicle she rode on would cruise to victory. Each month the feeling became stronger and this month it had turned into a relentless fantasy that haunted her day and night. The fantasy included directors, actors, writers, all milling around her.

The mind, even an alcohol-soaked mind, is capable of conjuring reality out of any set of imagined facts.

As she was day dreaming in the empty bar, Bill Langford walked in the front door. He was a tall, powerful-looking man of fifty, completely bald but still strikingly handsome in his brown casual suit.

She looked up at him. Actually, she had been expecting him to walk in. She had called his San Francisco office last night to inform him of her decision. "It didn't take you long to get here." Her voice was husky.

"Morning, Mary." He went behind the bar and poured himself a cup of coffee. After selecting a doughnut from a tray, he slipped under the bar and sat down on a stool next to her. "Sorry, Mary." He sipped his coffee. "The answer is the same. I can't go along with this movie bit. We'd both end up on welfare."

Suppressed anger and frustration always bubbled to the surface when she came in contact with Langford. This was the man she had foolishly plucked from a college football team to be in one of her movies! "I'll make a hit movie."

Langford smiled sadly. "You really believe that, don't you? Mary —

face it — you're a has-been — a little old lady who can't even remember lines anymore. How about those TV roles you had? You made a damn fool of yourself. That was only five years ago. You couldn't even stay sober for a day of shooting."

"The writing was terrible! The roles were meaningless!" She downed her coffee. "I — am — a — star."

"*Were*," corrected Langford. "*Now*, you're a middle-aged lush. You can't even do character parts."

She lit a cigarette with trembling fingers, almost dropping the lighter. "I've found a buyer for my half of the company. I'll have all the money I'll need for a movie."

"Buyer? You *are* crazy. You'll end up broke." Langford slid off the stool to his feet. "Oh Hell!" He strode out the back door to the beach.

OUTSIDE, THE BREEZE WAS REFRESHING, THE BEAUTY OF sand and water startling, but Langford could only think of the company and how he had been systematically taking his share of the profits and a portion of her share. If she found a buyer, there would be an audit! She might end up with the whole company.

How had he ever managed to love that woman? But he had loved her, and they had spent their honeymoon on this beach. He'd carried her over the threshold of that dirty little cottage she was presently living in. Why the Devil couldn't she be content with her liquor and her midnight swims!

Midnight swims. For years she had gone for midnight swims in the surf.

An interesting idea struck him. If she were to drown one night, the local Sheriff Whatley would write it off as accidental drowning and there would be no audit, no movie — no Mary Blair to complicate things.

He walked to the edge of the surf, knelt and fingered the wet sand. The solution to his problem was so simple that it was frightening.

He must plan carefully and have a well constructed script to follow. He would agree to the movie in front of a witness, perhaps even be enthusiastic about it. This would take some acting on his part. In fact, one of his first movies — a turkey — had a story line he could follow — to a point. An estranged husband, after establishing a fool-proof alibi, had driven fifty miles through a raging rainstorm to kill his wife. Then, he had returned to his apartment and after easily convincing the police that he hadn't left all evening, had gone to bed to dream of the money he'd get from the estate.

The husband was in bed basking in dreams of freedom and riches when the storm-weakened apartment house had collapsed, killing him.

Tonight would be different. The weather was perfect and in the eyes of the law, there would be no murder — simply a drowning.

He stood up and stared thoughtfully at the oncoming waves. He would invite one of his girl friends — Belle Andrews — to spend the weekend with him. After a few drinks, she wouldn't know what was going on but, once convinced that he'd been in the apartment all evening, would make a fine witness in case the police decided to investigate.

He pulled a cigar out of his pocket, took the wrapper off and walked back into the bar where he found Mary working on a fresh cup of coffee and talking to the bulky Sheriff Whatley.

He grinned at the craggy faced Sheriff. "Morning, Sheriff."

Whatley, comfortable-looking in his faded tan uniform, smiled back. "I see it's movietime again."

Whatley had been policing the area for over twenty years and was well acquainted with Mary and her dreams.

Langford lit his cigar. The play was about to begin. He took a puff and frowned thoughtfully. "Right, Sheriff. Except that this time, I might just go along with it."

Mary looked at him in amazement. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

Langford shrugged. "I got to thinking about it. Maybe we can work something out without you having to sell your share of the company. I met this young writer last week. He has some short stories and one novel published. He's full of ideas. He probably could come up with a good story for you. Of course, it wouldn't be a story about young love."

She took a swallow of her coffee. "I would want to be in complete charge — direct —." Her voice trailed off.

"Certainly," he smiled. "After all, *you* are the artist." He glanced at his watch. "I'll go back to the city and look into the financial aspects of this production. And also get in touch with this writer." Actually, the young writer was a sudden figment of his imagination.

Whatley nodded. "Sounds like a good deal to me, Mary."

"You bet it's a good deal," said Langford. He eyed Mary. "You'll have to help by cutting down on the drinking."

"I can stop any time I feel like it," she said.

"And how about those midnight swims?" asked Langford. "You better knock those off — at least while we're working on the picture."

Whatley grinned. "Mary's like a fish in the water — drunk or sober. I never seen anything like it."

"Well," shrugged Langford. "I just don't want any accidents." He touched Mary's wrist. "I'll see you tomorrow." He nodded at the Sheriff and left.

Mary was troubled by this unexpected turn of events. Her fantasy had turned into reality, and she didn't quite know how to handle it.

Whatley pointed a stubby finger at her. "Now, that's a break for you, Mary. Why don't you come over to the cafe with me and I'll treat you to a real breakfast."

She shook her head. "I'm not hungry." Her mind was a jumble of thoughts and fears. Flashes of past movies shot by her eyes. Would she have trouble remembering lines? Could she act — assume a role?

One question troubled her the most.

Why had Langford changed his mind so suddenly?

LANGFORD DROVE DIRECTLY TO HIS APARTMENT IN THE CITY and after a quick lunch of soup and crackers, sat down in his plush living room with a scotch and soda. He was developing a case of nerves. During his brief stint as an actor he had played the killer many times, so why couldn't he pull this off? After all, life is just one big movie.

He took a swallow of his drink and called Belle Andrews.

Belle was a plump, attractive blonde of twenty-five who worked in his office. She was always ready for a night of drinking or whatever, especially with the boss.

Yes, Belle would love to come over. That done, he went down to the manager's apartment and gave the man the monthly rent check. After a few minutes of small talk, he went down to the liquor store and bought a bottle of scotch. He carefully put the sales slip in his wallet, spent a few minutes talking sports with the clerk, then left. On the way back to the apartment, he held a short, senseless conversation with the doorman.

There were three solid witnesses available.

Back in his apartment, he put on bathing trunks and a heavy sweatshirt, then slipped on a pair of dungarees. After putting on sneakers, he went into the front room and made up a scotch and soda.

He was dozing in front of the TV set when the doorbell rang. He opened the door to face a grinning Belle Andrews, delightfully sexy in her red skirt, sweater and brown leather coat. She had a round face topped by a shock of gleaming blonde hair.

"Hi, Bill honey." She fell into his arms.

"I'll mix you a drink and then we'll order some pizza."

He disengaged himself and put a scotch and soda together, then

called a nearby Pizza house and put in an order to be delivered.

Despite food, drink and Belle, the afternoon seemed to drag. Langford found himself continually looking at his watch, an act that did not go unnoticed by Belle. Finally, at twenty minutes after eight, she asked about it.

He put on a grin. "Frankly, I'm expecting a phone call. I'm thinking about producing a movie with Mary as the star. A writer was supposed to call me."

"A movie with Mary Blair?" An expression of disbelief spread across her face. "You're kidding."

He studied her face. She was somewhat drunk but still aware of what was going on. Why not give her a dose of the movie bit. "I have a plot idea that might go over big."

She reached for another triangle of pizza. "I think you're crazy. Can I be in it?"

"What do you know about acting?"

"I could at least remember my lines."

He smiled. "Eat your pizza."

BY TEN O'CLOCK, BELLE, FULL OF PIZZA AND SCOTCH, WAS half asleep on the sofa. Langford turned on the TV.

Ten minutes later, Belle was asleep. Langford smiled. She was running true to form. She would wake up around six in the morning.

He put on his leather jacket and left the apartment, going down the back way to the basement. One of his three cars, a sleek, black Porsche, was parked in an alley. He went out to the alley, looked around for a moment and seeing no one, slid into the car. Ten minutes later he was driving down a freeway entrance.

Traffic was heavy until he passed the airport, then it thinned out so that he could do a comfortable fifty-five. He definitely didn't want a speeding ticket tonight.

At exactly eleven twenty-five, he turned off the freeway on to the winding road leading to San Verno. Just before the main street of the small town, he turned onto a dirt road and drove to a small, little used parking space near Mary's cottage. He eased the car in between two scrub trees and cut the engine.

He sat for several minutes listening to the roar of the surf, then, after putting his wallet and car keys into the glove compartment, slid out of the car.

There was a chill to the night air and a fog was hovering over the beach. He could barely hear the tinkling piano from Milo's bar in between the crashing waves. How in blazes can she go for a swim in

surf like that? A sliver of moon was peeking through a partially overcast sky.

He walked slowly down the sandy path to the rear of the cottage. As usual, there were no shades on the back windows. For some reason, Mary had always disliked window shades. He could see her in the front room standing in front of the fireplace which was full of papers. She was topless and wearing dungarees.

He shook his head slowly. There was nothing left of Mary Blair, actress. She had been such a beauty! Their love had been violent, overpowering.

And it had turned into mutual dislike. No — hatred. He had no qualms about drowning her.

She turned and walked over to a battered desk and picked up a sheaf of printed copy. There was an odd look on her face as she read the printed matter. Finally, she tossed the papers back on the desk and disappeared through a doorway into a bedroom.

She returned to the front room wearing a red robe and smoking a cigarette. There was a half filled bottle of bourbon on the table but she ignored it. After looking at the sheaf of papers again briefly, she went out the front door to the beach.

Now! She was going for her swim.

HE HURRIED AROUND THE COTTAGE AND WALKED THROUGH the wet sand to a large rock formation jutting out into the surf. This odd freak of nature had been photographed hundreds of times by tourists and was the site of Mary's nightly swim.

He took off his leather jacket, stuffed it in a crevice, then peered through the semi-darkness looking for a figure in the shallow, restless water.

The minutes went by slowly and he couldn't see anyone out there. He became impatient. Maybe she was going over to Milo's for a drink, wearing only her robe. When they were honeymooning, they used to do silly things like that.

Finally, a shadowy figure emerged from the fog. Yes, it was her. He watched closely as she pulled off the robe and walked into the surf. She soon became a bobbing head in the water. She seemed to be floating about on her back like a sea otter. This should be very simple: just get behind her and it would be over in a matter of minutes, seconds.

He slipped into the water and paddled toward her. He would have to be careful. She was a good swimmer, always had been.

Suddenly, the head disappeared.

He stopped paddling and stood shoulder deep in the cold water. Now

what! He looked around frantically, then heard her voice behind him.

"Hello, Bill. Enjoying your swim?"

He was amazed. "How did you —? I — just thought I'd come down and kick the movie idea around." He was grasping for words. "You had gone swimming so I decided to join you." He turned and faced her. "Just like the old days."

She was about five feet away from him, floating effortlessly. "You came down here to kill me, Langford," she said. "Just like that movie you were in — I directed that movie and I still have the script. I thought you were up to something when you changed your mind so fast this morning."

Sudden anger flooded his mind. "Damn you! You're going to drown!" He reached for her.

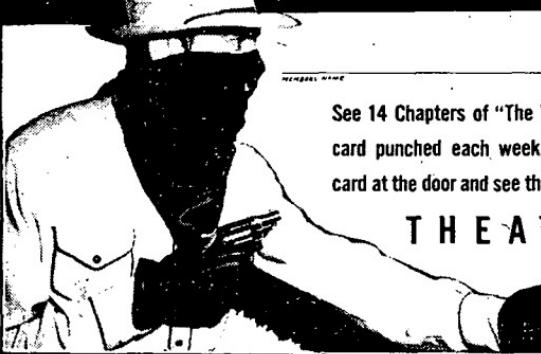
Something sharp pierced his chest. There was an instant of pain — then nothing.

She quickly pulled his body out beyond the rocks, then, after throwing the knife as far as she could into the ocean, she headed back to shore.

Just a little change in the script. Now what she needed most was a drink — hadn't had one since morning. Then she'd start planning her comeback!

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| 10. Mike Waring (The Falcon) | J. A.A. Fair |

Answers: 1-I 2-G 3-E 4-C 5-A 6-J 7-H 8-F 9-D 10-B



Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

Among the many talented ladies who write British crime fiction, few are the equal of Catherine Aird in devising ingenious plots and then clothing them in delightful and engaging language. In her latest, *Last Respects*, an unidentified body is found floating in an estuary. Detective Inspector Sloan is assigned to the case. Of course he brings Constable Crosby with him, which is enough to guarantee a good entertainment. All of the clues are carefully laid out for the analytical reader and all of them, minus a few red herrings, fit beautifully together at the finish. Definitely recommended. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

If one unidentified body in the river isn't enough, here comes another one in John R. L. Anderson's *Death in the City*. This one comes out of the Thames in metropolitan London and Colonel Peter Blair, of the Police Liason Unit, is called upon to investigate. All of the detailed police work is carefully set out with the essential clues proper-

125

ly included. A prominent ship owner is missing, but is the unknown body his? A large holding company is also known to be in serious financial trouble. All this unfolds gradually, tempting the reader to become a detective himself. The solution is entirely satisfactory in this classic British mystery that is better than most. (Scribner's, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

It is only necessary to list the title of this next work to insure major interest: *Masterworks of Crime & Mystery by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*. Edited by Jack Tracy, this volume presents much up to now almost unobtainable material, and it is a treasure trove. Readers are reminded that in addition to being Dr. John H. Watson's literary agent, Sir Arthur was a most distinguished author in his own right. Many of these stories bear a close resemblance to some of the Holmes canon. A wonderful treat for every mystery reader. Holmes and Watson do not appear, but the game is still afoot. (The Dial Press, \$14.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

An Ad for Murder by John Penn is announced as a debut novel, but the internal evidence disputes this. The writing is too expert, and too good technically, to be the work of a beginner. Furthermore, this isn't a true mystery, but a police procedural and a very good one. A retired major living in the British countryside reads a supposed publisher's ad announcing the forthcoming death of someone of the same name and rank as himself. It looks like a coincidence of name until some very strange things begin to happen to the major. The motive is well hidden and the police work is first rate. Exceptionally good. (Scribner's, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Mr. Bill Pronzini, whose sense of humor sometimes reminds us of kindly old Count Dracula, offers *Gun in Cheek*, a careful analysis of the very worst of crime fiction. The one good thing in this volume is Ed McBain's introduction; the rest is an exhumation of some of the ghastliest writing ever to get by a nodding editor. Some time ago Mr. Pronzini did a classic piece on the last chance Phoenix Press; now he has let go on the whole field of crime fiction, beginning with, "She unearthed one of her fantastic breasts from the folds of her sheath skirt." [Mercifully, some of our own early ventures into type managed to escape his gimlet eyes.] This is a unique book and one you won't want to miss if you would like to have some hearty laughs at the expense, in many cases, of some very distinguished writers. (Coward McCann, \$15.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Brock and the Defector is chiefly notable because its author, John Bingham, is currently a high ranking member of the British intelligence establishment and therefore certainly knows his subject. The defector in the case is a difficult individual long on temperament and short on temper. He has a British girl friend who sees in him her last chance for romance. Superintendent Brock is on the job, but in this case he does not emerge as a superman; in fact he makes two significant mistakes in interrogation that prove costly. This is a rather dragged out story, but a most believable one, visibly very true to this shadowy profession. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Another new novel of espionage is *The Russian Enigma* by Clive Egleton in which we find still another body floating in the water. SIS chief Charles Winter returns in Col. Egleton's best book to date. The scene shifts from England to the United States, and to Vienna, all centers of covert activity. There is a good deal of engaging action and the surprise at the ending is a real corker. If you like spy books, this is one of the best in a long time. (Atheneum, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Michael Hardwick is too good an author to have been wasted on *Bergerac*, the novelization of a successful British TV series. The catch line on the cover is, "He turned his back on a million for a policeman's pay." We wish that the book lived up to it. Mr. Hardwick is placed in the position of having to tell someone else's story, or perhaps a collection of authors, and he is further handicapped by the fact that when the book is over, the tale is only half told. This might have been appropriate in paperback, but hardly in a hardcover edition. (St. Martin's, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Margaret Jones reveals a thorough knowledge of present day China in *The Confucius Enigma*, a very good story about an Australian correspondent in Peking just before the "Gang of Four" was overthrown. The city of Peking, The Ming Tombs, and the Forbidden City are all depicted with notable accuracy. This is a tale of political intrigue rather than a mystery, but the unexpected ending, which is also completely logical, wins it a place in the genre. This very good book deserves a bigger and better format than was used; the type is much too small. Otherwise highly recommended. (St. Martin's, \$10.95) ●

When two professionals get together, they can learn a lot from each other — but sometimes the knowledge comes too late!

The Assassin's Assassin

by JOHN KEATING

ZZIMP! ZZIMP! THE SOUND OF THE SILENCED .22 BARELY disturbed the tranquility of the darkened motel room.

"Old friend," the killer said in his clipped British accent as he stepped nearer the bed, "I'm sorry it had to be me. But it had to be someone. If you start a job, you've got to finish it. Otherwise, it gives the profession a bad name."

As he bent to check for a pulse, he was startled to find himself staring into the barrel of a very large gun held unwaveringly in the hand of his intended victim.

"I've told you about that damned .22, Phillip," the other man said. "You should use a real gun instead of that plaything. Another —" Violent coughing wracked his body. "Another thing: don't check to see if the person is dead. Shoot again." He shook his head. "You were never careful enough."

"I don't suppose it would do any good to ask you to make it fast and clean?" Phillip sighed. "I didn't think so. You always liked the job better than most."

The man on the bed smiled. "I'm going to enjoy *this* the most. I'm sure you didn't find it too difficult to accept the assignment of killing me. You always were envious." A spasm of coughing overtook him, but the gun didn't waver. When he recovered, he said, "I'm going to shoot one of your kneecaps, Phillip, and watch you squirm. After awhile, I'll shoot the other one. When you think you can't bear any more pain, I'll prove you wrong by shooting an elbow. When the police finally break down the door, I'll shoot you in the throat or possibly in the stomach."

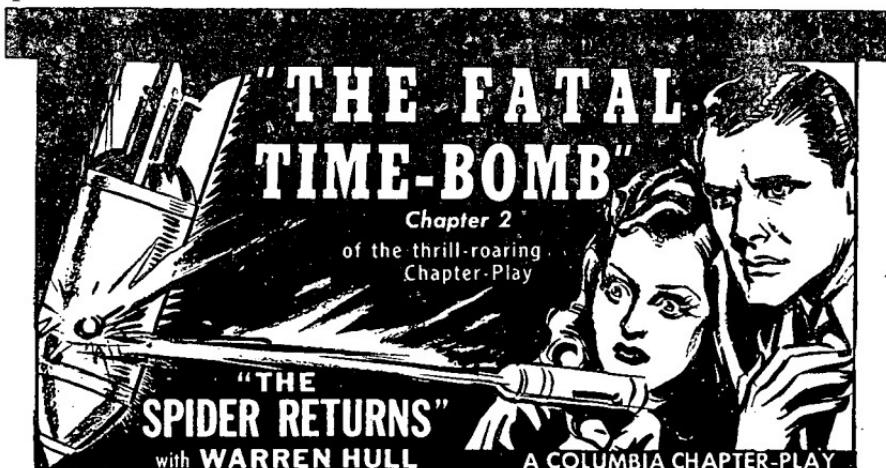
Perspiration broke out on the killer's lips as he anticipated the pain to come. "Arnold —" he began.

Any plea he might have voiced was interrupted by more coughing coming from the bed, followed by choking sounds. As Arnold raised the gun, life seemed suddenly to drain from his body. His grip on the pistol loosened. His hand fell forward onto his chest. His eyes closed.

Phillip stared for a moment at the still figure, not believing his good fortune. A moment before, he had been so very near a painful, lingering death. Now, he was free.

He breathed a sigh of relief, and smiling, bent to retrieve his pistol. He paused at the door and sneered at the figure on the bed. "You sadistic ass. You always had to toy with your victims before you killed them. I always warned you about that. Well, this time it was your mistake."

He turned, reached for the doorknob, froze as a cruel laugh came from behind him. Then came the booming report of a gun and a searing pain in his knee.



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